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The Unknown Dimension

The Unknown Dimension

European Marxism since Lenin

Edited by
Dick Howard
and
Karl E. Klare

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Preface

This book was conceived both as a contribution to intellectual history and to the study of the development of Marxism, and even more as a political project. Both of us have lived in Europe and learned from our European comrades, just as we have tried to convey to them some of the lessons of our own political experiences. We believe that, especially in the present period of rethinking and groping for new alternatives, it is important for the New Left to develop an understanding of its antecedents.

From the standpoint of reexamining the history of Marxism, no argument is necessary for presenting to the American reader the theorists discussed here. A cursory familiarity with the original sources (some of which are just now becoming available) is enough to convince anyone that what is known today as "Marxism" comes to us indirectly, refracted through ideological and historical prisms. The changes in advanced capitalist society, the rise of a New Left, and the successful revolutions in China, Cuba, Vietnam, and elsewhere, with the consequent breakup of the Soviet monopoly on the development of Marxist theory, have made a critical reexamination of the Marxist tradition both possible and necessary. We hope that this book will make some contribution to that effort.

A word on the choice of subjects. Though the book concentrates on European theory, this does not imply that we value European theory more than the contributions of Americans. It simply means that we in the United States have not been able to profit from exchanges of ideas with Europeans working on similar problems, partly because our publishing houses have not seen fit until recently to make available translations of even the great achievements of European radical thought, and partly because in the absence of new movements of radical criticism, neither orthodox Marxism nor academic scholars have stimulated any interest in or demand for these works.

The United States is not the only one left out: there is also no discussion of the Chinese, Cuban, Vietnamese, or Algerian experience, for instance. Once again, this is not because we do not consider their contributions important, but because there has already been fairly wide discussion of them, and the writings of many key figures (Ho Chi Minh, Mao Tse-tung, Ernesto Ché Guevara, Frantz Fanon, and others) are available in English translation. This is not true, by and large, of the persons treated in this book—even their names, let alone their ideas, are unfamiliar in this country. Recently a very few of the central works have begun to appear, and we hope that this anthology will provide a useful orientation to the materials becoming available.

Many important contributions had to be omitted due to considerations of space. Not only was this the case for such giants as Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky, whose works are translated and accessible. Other figures and currents very much within the scope of the “unknown dimension” had to be left out. We have been unable to include a discussion of the Surrealists. Neglected, too, are the works of Simone de Beauvoir and those of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Enzo Paci attempting to unite the insights of phenomenology with those of Marxism. Recent advances in Eastern Europe—the Lukács group in Hungary, the *Praxis* group in Yugoslavia, the work of Karel Kosík in Czechoslovakia—had to be excluded, as was the collective work of the French journals *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and *Arguments*, and the Italian journals *Quaderni Piacentini* and *Il Manifesto*. A discussion of contributions to Marxist economics was also beyond the scope of this book.

Clearly then, this collection is not intended to present a comprehensive or critical overview of European Marxism. Indeed, we are painfully aware that such a coherent and critical perspective is not possible at this point. Our hope is that the book will begin a political discussion that will enrich the on-going New Left movement and make a contribution to reversing the woeful state of social theory in the United States. If the book does no more than help to initiate such a discussion, we will consider it successful.

It will be obvious to the reader that, though the intent of the book is political, it does not set down or follow any “line,” nor do all the contributors lean in a common political direction. We have tried to present a wide variety of ideas that we thought should be heard. We did not attempt to present our judgments of or disagree-

ments with the theories elucidated, nor to obtain conformity among the contributors. We felt this procedure was the most useful at this stage, and we leave to future discussion any more final judgments on the ideas explored in this book.

Because of the seriousness of the political issues involved we must emphasize more than usual the traditional disclaimer. Each author (including the editors) assumes responsibility only for the ideas presented in his or her own contribution. Other than their individual articles, the editors assume responsibility only for the overall conception of the volume (including the weaknesses we are all too aware it contains).

By the time this book appears it will have been more than two years since its original conception. Over this time we have learned, grown, and changed a great deal, both generally and in terms of our views on the immediate subjects discussed here. We would not have been able to carry out this project at all were it not for many friends and comrades who read, translated, and criticized manuscripts, did research for us, put us in touch with writers here and in Europe, and helped in many other ways. Above all we are indebted to those who thought through the problems with us, gave us their ideas, encouraged us, and from time to time told us we were dead wrong. In addition to our contributors, we would like to thank Paul Booth, Paul Buhle, Paul Cardan, Bernard Conein, Mike Gillespie, Jan Goldstein, André Gorz, Jürgen Habermas, John Heckman, Mike Klare, Marc Kravetz, Claude Lefort, Tim Levenson, Serge Mallet, Ken Megill, Jenny Middleton, Paul Piccone, Laura Pinsky, Eberhard Schmidt, Allen Thiher, Rolf Tiedemann, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Jean-Marie Vincent, Rainer Zoll, the *Socialist Revolution* collective, the Radical Caucus of the Berkeley Sociology Department, and our students. We also want to thank Suhrkamp Verlag for permission to translate Alfred Schmidt's "Nachwort," to Henri Lefèvre's *Der dialektische Materialismus*.

Special thanks to Fred Block, Paul Breines, and Brigitte Howard for constant encouragement and help.

I (K.E.K.) would also like to acknowledge my debt to my parents, Mildred and Charles Klare, who helped make it possible for me to struggle to find an authentic Marxism.

Having acknowledged the many individuals who helped us directly, we must also recall that the attempt to construct and

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realize a liberated Marxism would not be possible or even conceivable were it not for the courage and persistence of countless anonymous people who, by their actions, have called into question and resisted advanced capitalist society. We wish to remember many who were particularly important to our own development: the people of Montgomery who walked to work instead of sitting in the back of the bus, the black college students who risked their lives for the right to get a cup of coffee at a lunch counter, the French workers and students of the May Revolt, the indomitable people of Vietnam, the women's movement that is forcing us to reexamine everything, and young people everywhere who despise oppression and the impoverishment of human life. This book would have no purpose were it not for the hopes they and so many others have rekindled for the possibility of human emancipation.

D.H.
K.E.K.

Carbondale/New York
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I

Introduction

1

The Critique of Everyday Life, the New Left, and the Unrecognizable Marxism

Karl E. Klare

I. The Possibility of Marxism

To be a living vehicle of critical social theory and revolutionary practice, Marxism must be rediscovered and re-created by every generation. Marxism is constantly in danger of becoming unresponsive to the movement of history or of being closed to the achievements, however mystified their form, of non-Marxist thought; of being appropriated by this or that group or faction for ideological use; or of not comprehending the changing experience of the working and other classes. From a living and self-conscious theory Marxism can and often has turned into an ossified false-consciousness, unable to account historically and critically for itself.

To ward off this ever present tendency toward petrification, Marxism must be continually reinvigorated. It must be compelled to comprehend the new practice and experience of the working classes, pushed to create an ever more subtle phenomenology of alienation, extended into new areas of investigation, and developed by the dialectical absorption and transcendence of new dimensions

of bourgeois thought. To quote Ben Brewster, “*Marxism must be . . . made possible again for every generation.*”¹

In the 1960s a New Left has arisen in resistance to the system of daily life in administered, welfare-state capitalism at its zenith. The New Left revolt has emerged not despite but in response to the results of smooth crisis management, “enlightened” social planning, and the “end of ideology” in advanced industrial capitalism. Its project is not to reform “one-dimensional society” but to transcend it entirely. In its rejection of the contemporary administered system of alienation, the New Left has spontaneously generated a political practice that stresses cultural revolution, the participation of all in their own emancipation, the prefiguring within the radical movement of the liberated political and social relations projected for the future; that is, the quest for “positive freedom.”

The rise of a New Left in almost all advanced capitalist nations creates a need for the refashioning of the critical theory of society: both in the sense that the experience of the new movements calls into question some of the fundamental tenets of “classical Marxism,” and secondly in that the refashioning of theory is needed if these movements are to realize their full political potential.² In seeking to make their actions intelligible and self-conscious, the New Left has often turned away from Marxism in disappointment, for the practice of the new movements within rapidly changing societies exploded the boundaries of what was understood to be the Marxist view of the world. Yet, as this book shows, what is known and transmitted to us as “Marxism”—by academic writers and the orthodox leftist parties alike—is an institutionalized ideological artifact emanating from the historical trajectory of Marxist movements, one that bears little resemblance to the assumptions and inherent potentials of Marx’s own intellectual project. Marxism is, in short, other than what we know it as. Until recently the theoretical currents that make this clear have had, for reasons of political history, an underground existence within Marxism. This underground tradition articulates a theoretical perspective that, despite its unfinished quality, goes to the root of the political practice spontaneously generated by the New Left. Put another way, the “underground Marxism” presents essential insights that have been recapitulated in the instinctive revolt of the new movements against advanced industrial society. Accordingly, this hidden dimension within Marxism represents a component of what must comprise any contemporary theory of social

change that thinks of itself as revolutionary. The rise of the New Left provides the historical validation for the recovery of the underground tradition. Continued historical amnesia in regard to the critical currents within Marxism condemns us to an impoverished and incomplete understanding of ourselves.

II. The Rediscovery of Marx's Project

The theorists grouped together in this book were preoccupied with the task of returning to or elaborating on the possibilities contained in Marx's original project. Their writings show that they understood Marxism as a social theory that is continuously becoming re-created. Thus, Karl Korsch set out, in *Marxism and Philosophy*, to render a critical and historical account of the development of Marxism itself; George Lukács and Antonio Gramsci, without access to the 1844 *Manuscripts* of the young Karl Marx, attempted to uncover the Hegelian origins of Marxism; Louis Althusser wrote a book entitled *Reading Capital*; and Jean-Paul Sartre wrote a *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. In the process of developing Marxism they shared a consistent emphasis on borrowing and advancing the great achievements of bourgeois thought: Gramsci read Benedetto Croce; Lukács was personally associated with Georg Simmel and Max Weber; Wilhelm Reich, the Frankfurt Theorists, and Sartre were all profoundly influenced by Sigmund Freud; Sartre studied Edmund Husserl closely, as well as Freud and others; and Herbert Marcuse was a pupil of Martin Heidegger.

It is impossible to neatly classify these theorists. Their work spans half a century of anguished upheavals of the European proletariat. They had to respond to the problems posed by the triumph of a workers' revolution in the Soviet Union, the re-stabilization of European capitalism and the isolation of the U.S.S.R., the eventual defeat of the proletariat in the West, the rise of Stalinism and of fascism, and, more recently, the rise of an integrated, sophisticated, welfare-state capitalism, along with the revolt of the Third World. Their political and theoretical differences on all of these questions, and the different paths they took in their eventually hopeless attempts to create a human politics in an inhuman and absurd era, make impossible any attempt at sharp classification.

Nevertheless, these authors form a distinctive moment within

the history of Marxism. The essence of this moment was the attempt to constitute Marxism as *a critique of everyday life*. This methodological departure was made, at least in large part, through a reconsideration of the Hegelian influences on Marx.

The critique of everyday life makes the social reproduction of the totality of everyday life, i.e., “culture,” the focus of its analysis. Contrary to the widely held notion that Marxism concerns itself with broadly sweeping and “inevitable” laws of history, this tradition has focused on the “micro-social” system, the social patterns of daily life.

The critique of everyday life proceeds by creating a subtle and rich description or phenomenology of the forms of alienation in daily life: in the family, sexuality, the work situation, cultural activity, verbal and other forms of communication, social interaction, institutions, and ideology. The analysis does not limit itself to the description of the immediate appearances of daily life, or the level of false-consciousness, but attempts to go beneath them to reach a dynamic historical understanding of broader social and class forces (the “macro-social” system).

There are many examples of this mode of critique within the “underground Marxism.” To name a few: Lukács’ discussion of reification; Wilhelm Reich’s studies of the family, adolescent sexuality, the institution of marriage, and the formation of “character structure”; Gramsci’s Sisyphean labors in Italian culture and social history, his attempt to re-create the “common sense,” the world view of ordinary Italian workers, and above all his concept of ideological and cultural hegemony; Sartre’s discussion of the formation and dissolution of social groups; the culture criticism of the Frankfurt School, especially when concretized in projects such as the collective study of *Authority and the Family*; Lefèvre’s sociologies of rural culture and urban life; and Marcuse’s studies of language, aesthetics, and psychoanalysis. This focus can be seen in key thematic concepts: Sartre’s notion of “lived experience,” Marcuse’s “one-dimensionality,” Henri Lefèvre’s “everydayness,” and the central category of the later Lukács’ ontology, “the everyday.”

Much of Marx’s own work represents what is probably the most far-reaching example of the critique of everyday life. Yet what is now popularly understood as “Marxism” seems to be something else entirely. Why this misreading has taken place is a complicated historical problem, which we cannot go into fully here. Still, the

main determinants of the problem are beginning to become well known: (1) the nonavailability of Marx's crucial writings until very recently;³ (2) the distortions resulting from the appropriation of Marxism by the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), Stalinism, and other ideological movements; (3) the tendency of Marxism to retreat from dialectical thought toward positivism and/or subjectivism when separated or isolated from the *praxis* of the working class; (4) the unwillingness of academics, until recently, to show imagination, let alone empirical standards, in their studies of Marx;⁴ (5) the general difficulties involved in elaborating a theoretical framework across a variety of cultural settings alien to the dialectical and other Continental intellectual traditions; and, perhaps most important, (6) the fact that prior to the integration of twentieth-century capitalism, insurgent political movements had to give priority to the immediate questions arising from the struggle for economic survival in societies of scarcity rather than being able to attack the one-dimensionalization of social life as a whole.⁵

Thus, for historical reasons, critical theory in the twentieth century had to reclaim an authentic Marxism. The "unknown dimension" represents the repressed consciousness of Marxism, which exploded under the impact of the Russian Revolution when, for a fleeting moment, the proletariat had a glimpse of what human life on the other side of alienation could be like.

What then are the main features of this underground tradition?

1. *The unknown dimension restored human consciousness, human subjectivity, to the heart of Marxism.* The standard understanding is, of course, that Marx held that consciousness is strictly determined by the economic realm, that Marx was only peripherally interested in culture, ethnic diversity, spiritual life, and other manifestations of the individual and collective consciousness, that in Marxism "being" precedes "knowing." The underground tradition demonstrates that these views are vulgarizations of Marxism. It demonstrates that Marx believed that men and women are the *subjects* of history, that history is the unfolding of the actualization of this subjectivity, and that there is no separation in Marxism, or in any dialectical theory, between "being" and "knowing." Apprehending the world in consciousness means shaping and changing it.

The underground tradition was hostile to all forms of reductionism and economic determinism, and to any conception that

sees Marxism as a set of predetermined or inevitable laws of social life. Such tendencies are present in the works of the “deans” of Marxist thought, such as Georgi Plekhanov, Karl Kautsky, V. I. Lenin at certain junctures (e.g., in the antidiialectical *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*), and even Engels. Against this, the unknown tradition argued that all forms of reductionism really amount to the creation of a new idealist metaphysics, or, as Sartre has put it, “playing the game of the positivists.” Such conceptions make human fate seem ever more impenetrable and opaque, when it is precisely the task of critical social theory to restore people’s consciousness of their freedom, to restore them as the subjects of social processes. Engels’ *Dialectics of Nature* was held incompatible with Marx’s concept of dialectical theory, which describes the mutual interaction of consciousness and the material world and therefore has only *social* life as its object.⁶

On this basis, the underground current was able to restore Marx’s conception of social change. For Marx, genuinely revolutionary political praxis can only be the self-realization or self-actualization of men and women. Authentic social change cannot be made “on behalf of” the proletariat by its representatives. It can only be self-activity, the proletariat emancipating itself. The political implications of this—particularly in terms of the Soviet experience—are as explosive as they are obvious. In the tortuous era of the interwar years, the unknown dimension preserved the authentic content and meaning of revolutionary socialism.

2. *Methodologically and politically, the unknown dimension put the concepts of the totality and the concrete universal at the center of its reconstruction of Marxism.*

In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács wrote:

Marxism is decisively distinguished from bourgeois science by its point of view of the totality, not by the importance that it gives to economic motives in the explanation of history. The category of the totality, the all-sided and determinant preeminence of the whole over the parts, is the essence of the method that Marx took from Hegel and placed in an original manner at the base of a completely new science. . . . *The preeminence of the category of the totality is the bearer of the revolutionary principle in science.*⁷

Hegel’s system is never satisfied with producing abstract, inductive generalizations or with understanding the general *form* of things,

institutions, or events. To get at the essence of things, abstract and formal ideas must find a concrete embodiment in an existing thing or institution; a unity of form and content must be found. Dialectical analysis discovers the *essence*, the *universal content* or *meanings* implied in concrete existence. The concrete gets its universal meanings (i.e., it is a “concrete universal”) in the context or setting of the whole epoch, institution, or culture (the “totality”). The whole gives meaning to the parts, which are the particular determinants of the whole.

Take, for example, the concept of the *concrete universal* as seen in Hegel’s ethics (as developed in the *Philosophy of Right*). Hegel is not satisfied with the existence of what might be called “conscientiousness,” or “right-thinking”—a formal inner commitment to moral principles (*Moralität*). He goes further and insists that the ethical life is impossible unless conscientiousness is embodied and expressed in the concrete institutions and rules of conduct of some community (“concrete morality” or *Sittlichkeit*). In this case the totality is represented by the nation or community (in the sense of its accumulated traditions, culture, laws, and institutions) at a certain stage in history. The community forms the context in which the ethical life takes on meaning and is actualized. Or, to choose a cruder example, an exhortation in a party program calling for public ownership of the means of production is an *abstract* universal. The self-consciousness of workers actually occupying a factory, at a point in history when this action expresses the authentic needs and will of the working class, is a concrete universal. The totality here is the historical context that drove the workers to act and which gives direction and intelligibility to the factory occupation.

Leaving aside the obvious differences between the Marxian and the Hegelian conceptions of the dialectic, Marxism in the underground tradition also attempts to uncover the universal meaning of the discrete aspects of social life. Social life is seen as an integrated whole, a totality; one must dig deep beneath everyday appearances to uncover their meanings, i.e., what is revealed in each concrete aspect of daily life about the nature of social system as a whole.⁸ Underground Marxism is opposed to instrumentalist and positivist philosophies (including positivist varieties of Marxism) in that it refuses to succumb to the fragmented, alienated view of people that prevails in capitalist society and which it regards as the false-consciousness of alienated society. Human beings are seen as poten-

tially whole, unified, integrated beings who produce their daily lives within the social totality of which they are the authors.

The implications of this methodological focus are profoundly radical. The concepts of the *concrete universal* and *totality* are the “bearers of revolutionary content” for they imply both the possibility and necessity of *total* revolution. As Herbert Marcuse wrote:

The unerring glimpse into the essence of man becomes the inexorable impulse for the foundation of radical revolution. That the actual situation of capitalism is not only a question of economic or political crisis, but a *catastrophe* of the *human essence*—from the outset this insight condemns every merely economic or political *reform* to futility and unconditionally demands the catastrophic *Aufhebung* [transcendence] of the existing conditions through total revolution.⁹

In other words, a methodology that attempts to weave together the apparently disparate and discrete aspects of daily life must be grounded in a political and theoretical commitment to uphold a view of men and women as whole, unified, social individuals, with boundless potential for self-realization in the face of their fragmented, deformed appearance in alienated society. Moreover, the *concrete* in *concrete universal* implies immediacy, a connection with the present, and a refusal to disjoin form and content in political work. Marxism cannot simply juxtapose an abstract ideal with present-day reality. The roots of the future must lie in the critique of and resistance to the present. The future liberation must be prefigured in the political forms of the revolutionary movement. The Marxism of the underground tradition demands its own concrete actualization in the movement for social change itself.¹⁰

These emphases imply an immanent critique of the theory and practice of orthodox Marxism. The tendency of orthodox Marxist movements to see people primarily in their situation as workers and to structure political action around the workplace is replaced by the view that not just physical, economic deprivation, but the entire social and cultural situation of men and women is the subject of revolutionary intervention. To quote André Gorz:

The dictatorship of capital is exercised not only on the production and distribution of wealth, but with equal force on the manner of producing, on the model of consumption, and on the manner of consuming, the

manner of working, thinking, living . . . over the society's vision of the future, its ideology, its priorities and goals; over the way in which people experience and learn about themselves, their potentials, their relations with other people and with the rest of the world. This dictatorship is economic, political, cultural, and psychological at the same time: it is total. That is why it is right to fight it as a whole, on all levels, in the name of an overall alternative. . . . The cultural battle for a new conception of man, of life, education, work, and civilization, is the precondition for the success of all the other battles for socialism because it establishes their meaning.¹¹

Orthodox Marxism has also been characterized by a sharp separation between the vision of socialist human relations and the day-to-day practice of the movement. A common ideological pretext for postponing the concrete implementation of the Marxist critique is the so-called "stage theory," which holds that a given historical juncture makes some other struggle than the one for socialism the primary task of the moment. Populist and popular-front oriented American Marxism has been unusually susceptible to this permanent postponement of the effort to implement the Marxist critique of social life.

In contrast to orthodox Marxism, which stressed the party and the trade unions as the primary organizations of the proletariat, the underground theorists have looked on workers' councils as key institutions for revolutionary strategy. The workers' councils were seen as concrete universals, for they represent the universal interests of society in the abolition of capitalism, alienated labor, the division of labor, private property, etc., as opposed to unions, which represent only the particular interests of the working class within the overall scheme of capitalism. The function of unions is to reach an ever more advantageous wage bargain with the capitalists, not to challenge their domination and control of the productive process and society. Similarly, Gramsci and others argued that the councils are a living critique, a "critique-in-action" of the work situation—a critique made not through pamphlets and manifestos but directly through collective action transcending the situation of alienated, stratified labor.¹² The hopes placed in the workers' councils, particularly on the basis of the role of the Soviets in the early years of the Russian Revolution, contrast with the glorification of the Party by the Third International. The Party was seen as the "concrete embodiment" of the will and in-

terests of the oppressed classes. But the Party substituted its organizational uniformity for the putative unity of the working classes, its ideological and “scientific” position for the ambiguous and uncertain will of the proletariat, and its abstract slogans and manifestos for the immediate felt needs of the masses. It therefore epitomized an *abstract*, not concrete, universal.

The theoretical perspectives elaborated by the Marxists of the unknown tradition implied a radical, participatory, and libertarian practice. But the actual working out of such a practice was only glimpsed by these theorists, at least until the past decade. The ideas of the underground Marxists did not and could not find a full political embodiment—partly as a result of their internal weaknesses and partly because of the limitations imposed by historical circumstances. The evanescent hopes for libertarian revolution and the workers’ councils in Europe were finally crushed for the previous generation by the defeat of the Spanish revolution.

The internal weaknesses of the unknown tradition stemmed from the political isolation imposed on it by the Third International, Fascist prisons, or, in some cases, self-chosen. When separated from direct contact with the working class, the work of Marxist theorists has tended to degenerate into extremes of subjectivism (Ernst Bloch), scientific positivism (the later Karl Korsch, Theodor Adorno’s work on *The Authoritarian Personality*, Louis Althusser), pessimism (Marcuse), or despair (much of Sartre).

True, the underground tradition preserved, through the hopeless era of fascism, the collapse of proletarian revolution, and the early cold war, the most utopian and eschatological themes in Marx’s vision of socialism.¹³ As will be argued in a moment, this project has been vindicated by the changes in capitalist society that have made the critique of everyday life a central focus of any possible critical theory of social change. But the underground tradition failed to achieve the transcendence of its own utopian function during a transitional historical epoch. That is, until very recently the underground current failed to integrate its critique of daily life into an adequate social theory or macro-social analysis. It has been unable to generate an analysis of the changing class relationships and structures of advanced industrial society, or of how these changes have affected the lives of the various groups within society. Marx’s work had political impact because his critique of capitalism was at the same time both a social analysis of its structure and historical horizons, and also a theory of how

the contradictions within that structure would give rise to agents of a negating and transcending praxis (i.e., the proletariat). In the absence of an analysis of the changing forces of advanced capitalism that will render everyday life not only alienating but intolerable and unbearable, and that will make possible the transcendence of capitalist society, the underground Marxism was unable to avoid a retreat from social theory to a merely "moral" or "aesthetic" critique of society.

Much recent work connected with the underground tradition implicitly recognizes the limits of the politics of revulsion. It attempts to move toward social theory by accounting for what the New Left revolt is saying and doing spontaneously (e.g., the work of Gorz, Marcuse, Mallet, etc.). On the other hand, the post-war period has also seen the rise of "scientific" tendencies that assert the necessity of founding a critical science of practice (although one might question whether any of the representatives of this trend have in fact succeeded in laying the foundations for a critical theory of contemporary class relationships and social life). This group would include the work of such widely different theorists as Galvano Della Volpe, Lucio Colletti, and Louis Althusser (who have launched a biting polemic against the Hegelianizers within Marxism), and Jürgen Habermas.

Another crucial weakness is the tradition's almost complete lack of concern for the Third World and the international nature of the capitalist system. This is a blindness shared with almost all European thought, radical or bourgeois. Korsch did call attention to the importance of events in China and the Philippines, and more recently the Third World revolt has found recognition in Sartre's and Marcuse's work. But on balance it is clear that the underground Marxists, no less than most orthodox Marxists, have failed to transcend the boundaries of European culture. Given the explosive dialectic of imperialism and revolution in the Third World, this stands as a damning indictment of their work.

Finally, many of the achievements of the underground Marxism were vitiated by their elitist character and technically superb obscurantism. Theory was written by classically trained prodigies steeped in "high culture." With the exception of Gramsci, the theorists failed to engage the problems of mass culture and social history in a sustained way; nor did they (with a number of exceptions) write in a fashion accessible to anyone but university-trained scholars.

These weaknesses aside, the underground Marxists ran up

against external obstacles that condemned many of their ideas to obscurity until now. Beyond the labyrinthine nature of proletarian politics under the sway of the Third International, it is probably true that only with the full maturity of capitalism and the working classes in the advanced industrial systems of the postwar era could a libertarian, totalistic, and cultural model of socialist politics fully appear. The beginnings of such a politics have been glimpsed in the upheavals of recent years, to which we now turn.

III. The New Left in the Postaccumulation Era

In the past decade a New Left has emerged on the world scale of advanced industrial society: in North America, Western Europe, and Japan as a resistance to advanced, welfare-state capitalism, and in Eastern Europe as a revolt against bureaucratic and authoritarian regimes. Everywhere, but particularly in the United States (the primary subject of this essay), the New Left has been profoundly influenced by the example and consequences of the upheaval in the Third World, particularly by the Vietnamese revolution.

In the United States the New Left did not arise with an avowedly socialist or Marxist orientation. The paralysis and irrelevance of orthodox Marxism and the traditional pragmatism and anti-intellectualism of American radicalism combined to create a persistent suspicion of Marxism. Originally the new movements were a response to racism, poverty, and the depravity of imperialist wars. More recently they have attacked the irrational economy that systematically reproduces socially wasteful industry, poverty, meaningless and regimented work, barbarized urban life, and decaying environment at a time when technology and capital accumulation have rendered them historically obsolete. The New Left now advances a general critique of the impossibility of self-expression, self-realization, autonomy, or community under American capitalism and sets itself the project of overturning that social system as a whole. From the experience of confrontation, by learning from countless mistakes and false starts, and by the logic of its own development, the New Left has created a distinctive political practice and style of work. This political practice reunites it to earlier revolutionary traditions while at the same time it is the working out of a new conception, a new model of socialism appropriate to the potentials of advanced industrial society.

This political practice developed spontaneously and instinctively, by trial and error. It did not follow from an explicit worldview or political program, much less from a reading of European Marxism. Nevertheless, the initiatives of the new activists, with their stress on prefiguring the future, on total, cultural revolution, and on "critique-in-action," do in fact recapitulate and concretize the political themes and implications of underground Marxism. To the extent that the New Left embodies and advances libertarian traditions within the history of socialism, underground Marxism may be considered a repressed but "very much alive earlier moment of our own consciousness."¹⁴

Defending this thesis fully would require writing a comprehensive and critical history of the New Left, a task which, although urgently needed, cannot be undertaken here.¹⁵ What we call the New Left is more a transitional political-cultural phenomenon than a single coherent political force; it is made up of widely different and often contradictory tendencies, movements, and small groups that flare up now here, now there, representing many more people than those who have an actual organizational affiliation. Thus, for every experimental initiative, for every attempt to break through the limitations of past models and theories, one can point to some group steadfastly trying to squeeze reality into the precepts of previous and distant revolutions. Likewise, for every example of an attempt to break through to the other side of alienation, to prefigure new social relationships and a participatory democracy, one can point to numerous examples of authoritarianism or manipulation. (One of the most significant contributions of women's liberation within the New Left has been its devastating critique of the failure of the movement's leaders, who are mostly white, middle-class, heterosexual men, to generate a nonrepressive style of political work.) The following discussion singles out those trends which have consistently represented the distinctive promise of the New Left over the past several years and plays down, for the moment, its weaknesses.

The New Left stresses that the locus of revolutionary social change is not limited to major political and economic institutions but extends to the consciousness and daily life of the individual. Consciousness is seen as the bearer of the social, economic, sexual, cultural, ideological, and common-sense underpinnings that form the moral basis of the old way of life and old institutions. Accordingly, it must be radically and totally altered along with the struc-

ture of society in order to create the normative and intersubjective basis of the new way of life. As opposed to Orthodox Marxism, which holds that consciousness and social life will change more or less automatically as a result of changes in the mode of production, the New Left insists that fundamental changes in the individual's consciousness and way of life are not an outcome but a *prerequisite* of revolutionary social change. Cultural revolution and the critique-in-action of everyday life are therefore at the core of the revolutionary process from the outset.

This is closely connected with another central tenet of the politics of the New Left, the concept of self-liberation. Men and women are seen as the authors of their own liberation. By definition the movement can only be successful if the men and women for whose interests it speaks participate themselves directly and actively in the processes and institutions that will bring about their emancipation. Hence the emphasis on participatory democracy, counterinstitutions, community control, and workers control. Likewise, the suspicion of "vanguards" that propose to make the revolution "on behalf of the people" and of the classical Leninist political party insofar as it is justified by the adage that revolutionary consciousness comes to the proletariat "from the outside."

These twin emphases—on the individual's consciousness and daily life as loci of revolutionary change, and on the self-liberation of the oppressed—are the bases of the tentative response the New Left offers to one of the classical problems of Marxism, the "subject-object" problem. Marxism posed the proletariat as the subject of the socialist revolution that would end the era of alienated "pre-history" and usher in a classless society. In practice, the working classes in the West, for historical reasons too complex to enter here, have failed, except at rare moments, to attain consciousness of this historic vocation. In the face of this dilemma, the Party is often seen as the "representative" or "objective embodiment" of the will of the working class. But the Party cannot by itself bring revolutionary consciousness to the oppressed. When Marxist parties, particularly the Communist Parties of the Third International, attempted to do this without the mediation of other political forms, they have more often than not ended up by treating the proletariat as objects, not subjects of history, frequently suppressing the initiative, creativity, and spirit of the rank-and-file. In rejecting this model and insisting on a return to the authentically Marxist notion of the self-emancipation of the oppressed, the

New Left must, by its own logic, conclude that if no party or organizational superstructure can "objectively" substitute its revolutionary consciousness for the putative but nonexistent revolutionary consciousness of the mass of people, then revolutionary social change can only come about by actually changing individually the consciousness of the oppressed. The New Left has placed its priority on finding the methods and organizational mediations that will make possible the transformation of each activist as an individual. Hence the interest in small "consciousness raising" groups (pioneered by women's liberation), which attempt to come to grips with personal experiences of alienation; in the evolution of new life-styles, communes, and other new living arrangements to replace the nuclear family; in new forms of education; and in community-controlled institutions through which individuals can learn to assume the responsibilities of governing an alternate society.

In passing, it is this aspect of the New Left that partly gives rise to its fascination with Chinese Marxism. The Chinese have understood that the individual must undergo profound changes before and during the process of social change. They have experimented with a wide variety of organizational and political forms besides the Party to involve the individual in the change of his or her self-image, view of the world, and way of life. One has only to read William Hinton's monumental *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* to be convinced of this.¹⁶ (The same applies in different ways to other Third World revolutions, such as the Vietnamese and Cuban.)

One should also note that the above is not to be construed as an argument against political parties in general, but only against a particular role that has been assigned to the Party in the past at great cost. The New Left might reasonably be criticized for taking its attachment to spontaneity to an extreme which limits and dampens its potential impact. Recently, particularly since the French revolt of 1968, writers such as Gorz have opened the question of the functions and structure of a new type of revolutionary party.

Another characteristic of the New Left is its attempt to organize its political work so as to prefigure the social relationships of the future. Although the content of what are seen as desirable ("liberated") human relationships changes constantly as insight deepens, the idea of a critique-in-action has been present all along.

The movement itself is supposed to be a model of the way in which people will live and relate to each other in the future (i.e., a concrete universal). Hence the rejection of authoritarian power relationships in the movement, the refusal of a set division of labor, the rotation of leadership positions and roles, and the creation of collectives to provide for mutual support and growth. As Gorz has written, for the mass of people the revolutionary project

can only constitute . . . a total stake justifying a total risk if the action of struggle has already been an experiment for them in self-organization, in initiative and collective decision-making, in short, an experiment in the possibility of their own emancipation.¹⁷

Hence, also, the working out of new ideas, new cultures, and alternative models of intellectual work to provide the “moral” or “spiritual” premises of the new way of life. In short, the New Left seeks “positive freedom,” a freedom whose content is an articulated model of a new civilization, and not just “negative freedom” from want, violence, and oppression (although obviously the latter is a prerequisite of the former). The concern with the critique-in-action, i.e., with the movement as a concrete universal, gives rise to the style of work characteristic of the New Left: the stress on dramatic and exemplary action, the “politics of theater,” the building of counter-communities, the creation of an underground culture and underground media, and the adoption of new lifestyles.

The New Left has stressed the *total* nature of the revolution in social life that it contemplates. Thus, many activists tend to be hostile to the privileged position accorded the workplace and the industrial working class in orthodox Marxism and somewhat skeptical of those who issue calls for students to drop everything and “go to the workers.” This is partly due to an interpretation of recent changes in the class structure, and partly to repugnance at the elitism and self-denial involved. But most important has been the New Left’s attempt to transcend the definition of men and women by their position in the productive process. Men and women are seen as whole human beings whose daily life is composed of a myriad of social contexts (of which the workplace is only one, although of course one of the most central). Thus, the entire quality of life in American civilization becomes the potential subject of revolutionary struggle.

The New Left's refusal to separate and compartmentalize the different facets of social life implies a rejection of the nature and conception of work in capitalist society. The New Left seeks to abolish "work" as a separate part of daily life as opposed to fun, play, leisure, consumption, etc. One of its most fundamental demands has been the insistence on the creation of meaningful, expressive, and self-fulfilling work, thereby resurrecting in practice Marx's critique of alienated labor in capitalist society. There was a partially understandable tendency for this theory to be obscured during the era of capital accumulation when the priority had to be on fighting the intensity, duration, and low wages of labor. Orthodox Marxism sometimes even glorified back-breaking labor in order to stake a moral claim for workers (rather than capitalists) to control the surplus. Thus, orthodox Marxism often found itself under the cultural/psychological hegemony of the capitalist work ethic. Needless to say, exploitative conditions of labor are still the basic reality in the United States. But the New Left arises in a "postaccumulation" era and, therefore, has the historical possibility of rejecting and transcending the work ethic altogether.

Throughout its growth, the New Left has been closely linked with cultural revolution—not only in the broad sense of attempting to create a new way of life, but also in the more special sense of the phrase, in avant-garde currents in art, music, and literature. Even if the activists have often criticized the nonengagement of artistic currents, the New Left has always thrived in the milieu of counter-culture, from the beatniks to the contemporary rock scene. As with work, the New Left seeks to abolish culture and the aesthetic as separate and superfluous domains. The aesthetic must be integrated into the social reproduction of daily life as a repository of human meanings and hopes. Accordingly, it must be an essential moment of the political movement, a fact symbolized by the revolt of May 1968 in Paris when an explosion of artistic creativity accompanied combat on the barricades. The May Revolt provides a tentative answer to the question with which Herbert Marcuse ends this passage:

The aesthetic as the possible Form of a free society appears at that stage of development where the intellectual and material resources for the conquest of scarcity are available. . . . The insistence that a socialist society can and ought to be light, pretty, playful, that these qualities are essential elements of freedom, the faith in the rationality of the imagina-

tion, the demand for a new morality and culture—does this great anti-authoritarian rebellion indicate a new dimension and direction of radical change, the appearance of new agents of radical change, and a new vision of socialism in its qualitative difference from the established societies? Is there anything in the aesthetic dimension which has an essential affinity with freedom not only in its sublimated cultural (artistic) but also in its desublimated political, existential form, so that the aesthetic can become a *gesellschaftliche Produktivkraft*: factor in the technique of production, horizon under which the material and intellectual needs develop?¹⁸

It is no accident that the underground tradition has produced the great works of aesthetics and cultural history within Marxism.¹⁹ To be sure, with the partial exceptions of Marcuse and Lukács, the underground theorists did not successfully integrate politics and aesthetics in the way that that project is conceived today. Nevertheless, one of the potentially most fruitful areas of cross-fertilization between underground Marxism and the New Left is the chance offered a revitalized Marxism to combine cultural and political revolt, a goal toward which the New Left has been groping.

In terms of defining the self-consciousness, character, and possibilities of the white New Left, undoubtedly the most important contribution has been women's liberation and the allied movement of liberation for homosexuals (gay liberation).²⁰ These currents are in the most immediate sense a critique of everyday life: they throw the family, marriage, sexuality, and culture into crisis. The women's and gay movements sometimes choose styles of politics that seem restricted and particular in content (e.g., "consciousness raising" groups). But these forms are concretely universal because they subject interpersonal relations to criticism at the deepest level. In terms of the above problems, women's liberation asserts the capacity of all women to comprehend their situation in the society. Likewise, women's liberation raises the age-old question of the inequitable social division of labor in a fashion that calls the division of labor itself into question. In short, women's liberation and gay liberation explode orthodox definitions of socialism (public ownership of the means of production, etc.) and call for a *totalistic redefinition of the content of liberation*.

Similarly, the revolutionary black nationalism of recent years challenges not only the grievances black people have as a particular

group (i.e., discrimination, lack of social services, etc.) but their deprivation as whole human beings, the rape of their culture, history, and humanity. In so doing the blacks reveal the universal content of daily life under capitalism—the denial of human aspirations, possibilities, and hopes. The black movement has not only advanced the interests of blacks within the given structure. Rather, it has advanced a full critique of their “particular” grievances in such a way as to make clear that these grievances are the unqualified wrongs of a system that must be restructured as a totality. Concretely, this has implied a revolution in black self-consciousness, the absolute refusal to postpone black liberation or to subordinate it to some allegedly privileged or prior task, and making the New Left understand that the struggle against racism is not an afterthought of revolution but its precondition.²¹

As stated at the outset of this section, I have chosen to cite the most innovative and positive features of the New Left (even though these might not be the most visible) and to underplay its contradictions, ambiguities, difficulties, and downright failures. It should be noted that these difficulties arise not only from the failure to reach agreement on or actually measure up to the goals described above, but also from problematical aspects of the goals themselves. Thus, healthy skepticism about the classical Leninist party can lead to a refusal to consider problems of organization altogether. The work of elaborating new life-styles can cut New Leftists off from contact with the mass of ordinary people bound to jobs, family situations, the draft, etc. More broadly, the New Left has not posed the question of political power in a serious way and it has not produced a comprehensive social theory of advanced capitalist society. The vast and diversified proletariat of contemporary capitalism provides the opportunity for a new, pluralistic model of socialism with, for example, autonomous political and cultural movements of women, blacks, chicanos, latinos, and other groups, and the decentralization of social decision-making. Yet, the difficult and rending problem of how disparate groups and classes can come together, conceptualize their grievances and suffering in the same general terms, and jointly realize the revolutionary project, has hardly been dealt with. These and other critical problems account for the sporadic and uneven nature of the New Left’s impact, particularly since the 1969 debacle of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the frustration, the grasping for formulas and ideologies to explain away impasses, and so on. Nonetheless, the New Left’s repudiation of the depravity of racism and

imperialism, its antiauthoritarian and critical spirit, and its rejection of the abysmal death culture of capitalism, have sent shock waves throughout American society and have engaged countless people, if not in political action, at least in reflection on their lives, hopes, and fate.

But is the flowering of a libertarian, totalistic Marxism historically intelligible? Within advanced capitalism's horizons of social change, is a movement that permanently explodes the very meaning of liberation historically possible, a real alternative?

Marx devoted his life to the struggle against the poverty and abuse that has everywhere accompanied the rise of capitalism. Yet his underlying purpose and the vision of his social theory went far beyond this, foreseeing not only the end of abuse but the end of alienated, meaningless labor; not just the mitigation of the struggle for survival but the extrication of men and women from the need to struggle for survival. He foresaw the end not only of economic underdevelopment but of the underdevelopment and impoverishment of human relations. His project contemplated the release of the creative potential of all men and women, and the abolition of distinctions between work, play, leisure, and art in daily life.

It is a commonplace but important observation that up to now the successful revolutions made in the name of Marxism have occurred in underdeveloped or semideveloped countries, that is, in situations of oppressive and overwhelming scarcity. The conditions of societies of scarcity place endless material barriers in the way of the total liberation of men and women. Total liberation can occur only when society has accumulated sufficient resources to overcome the material struggle for survival as its primary concern. Thus, the revolutionary regimes in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, Vietnam, and elsewhere have had paramountly to devote themselves to rapid, disciplined economic development and accumulation to wrest their countries from blinding poverty. This does not mean that these revolutions have not transformed social life fundamentally and radically, nor that the prevalence of scarcity completely prevents the de-alienation and transformation of the situation of the individual, thereby "justifying" any manner of repressive measures in denial of popular participation and initiative. The marked contrast between the authoritarian Stalinist experience in the U.S.S.R. and the authentic popular engagement found in the Third World communist revolutions makes this clear. Nor does it mean that the Soviet and Third World revolutions shouldn't be studied with the utmost care, especially in view of

the hegemonic position of the United States in the world system of capitalism. It does mean that the models of these revolutions and the varieties of Marxism that make them intelligible will not be sufficient to comprehend social change in advanced capitalism. As David Cooper has written:

A cardinal failure of all past revolutions has been the dissociation of liberation on the mass social level, i.e., liberation of whole classes in economic and political terms, and liberation on the level of the individual and the concrete groups in which he is directly engaged. If we are to talk of revolution today our talk will be meaningless unless we effect some union between the macro-social and the micro-social, and between "inner reality" and "outer reality." We have only to think back about the personal factor in Lenin that made it possible for him to ignore so much of the manœuvrings of the super-bureaucrat Stalin until it was too late. We have only to consider the limited *personal* liberation achieved in the "Second World" (the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe). Then we get the point that a radical de-bourgeoisification of society has to be achieved in the very style of revolutionary work and is not automatically entailed by the seizure of power by an exploited class. We must never forget that conditions of scarcity inhibit—though not necessarily prohibit—personal liberation in this sense. But in the First World we have conditions of potential affluence which must be grasped and realized.²²

The model of social change for advanced industrial society must be based on the fullness of the revolution possible on its terrain.²³

It may well be that until recently the project of total, libertarian revolution was also rendered utopian in the West by the historical quest for capital accumulation. It is not, therefore, entirely accidental that the underground Marxism was underground. But in the past generation advanced capitalism (at least in the United States) has gone beyond accumulation to enter the era of *disaccumulation*.

The concept of *disaccumulation* (presented in a seminal article by Martin Sklar)²⁴ is preferred to the ideological and relativistic bourgeois concepts *post-scarcity*, *post-industrial*, *abundance*. The terms *accumulation* and *disaccumulation* are defined by reference to the ratio between the social labor-time represented by men and women exercising their labor-power and the social labor-time embodied in the means of production (i.e., the ratio between "living labor" and past "dead labor"). Accumulation is underway when

increased production and operation of physical means of production in the basic goods sector require an increased expenditure of living, human labor-power (as a proportion of socially necessary labor-time). Conversely, when technology and capital accumulation are such that increased output in the basic goods sector is accompanied by decreased employment of living labor-power in this sector (once again, as a percentage of social labor-time), disaccumulation has begun. Disaccumulation “means that the expansion of goods-production capacity proceeds as a function of the sustained decline of required, and possible, labor-time employment in goods-production.”²⁵

The potential offered by the disaccumulation process makes advanced capitalism qualitatively different from any previous stage of society. The production of the material basis of society, the goods and machines necessary to guarantee everyone’s livelihood, recedes as a percentage of society’s productive effort. Goods production no longer needs to be the central focus and determinant of social organization for the mass of people. That is, the struggle for survival need no longer be the preoccupation of men and women. The reified and alienated social relations characteristic of societies in which the mass of people are permanently caught up in the struggle for survival (i.e., all capitalist societies) need no longer determine the quality of human interaction, culture, and sexuality. Men and women can become whole, self-realizing, and fully human beings because they are increasingly free from the imperatives of reproducing their material livelihood.

Likewise, the character of work itself changes. Work as “labor,” as a mere means of survival, is transcended by the possibility of work as an end in itself, valued for its own sake as a mode of human expression. In the immediate material reproduction of society human labor can be replaced by that of machines. People can increasingly turn their efforts from the production of commodities to the production of culture and creative forms of social interaction, and to the introduction of the aesthetic into the material and social reproduction of society. Work ceases to be a privatized commodity and takes on the character of the collective appropriation of society’s talents, consciousness, accumulated knowledge and imagination (thereby prefiguring the collective social relations of the future).

The research of Sklar, the group of historians around *Studies on the Left*, and others establishes that the impact of this passage

from accumulation to disaccumulation on American economics, public policy, and intellectual life was first sensed as early as the 1920s. But the liberating potential of disaccumulation has appeared within the historically and politically determined structure of American capitalism. The dominant corporate class has long been conscious that contemporary technological capabilities render their continued class domination of society historically obsolete and counterproductive. Earlier in this century they advanced a sophisticated political and ideological response to the impending crisis of disaccumulation and intervened aggressively and successfully in American politics to preserve their position. This political/ideological initiative has been described as the system of "corporate liberalism."²⁶ The results of this intervention, consolidated as a social system by the time of World War II, are the perverted under-utilization of productive capacity, the maintenance of scarcity within abundance and of poverty within the "affluent society," and the systematic production of waste. The potentials of a socially integrated work process have been suppressed by the "rationality" of the private appropriation of society's resources.

The potentials and contradictions of American capitalism in the era of disaccumulation have rendered total, cultural revolution the possible and necessary mode of social change in the future. Speaking of the 1968 French revolt, Tom Nairn writes:

Every past revolution has been . . . in a discord with the real potential of society, at that historical moment: 1640, 1789, the revolutions of the nineteenth century, and of course the social revolutions in backward countries of this century. May, 1968 was the precursor of the first revolution in history . . . where the collective human voice can at last utter the immense, gathered potential of human culture where it presses invisibly upon the frame of the archaic social order. Because it is . . . "overdue" as no other historical revolt was or could be, it is sure of a success and a meaning which no other revolt could have. Whereas all other revolutions were inevitably struggles against impossible odds . . . the new revolution will—on the contrary—exceed every vision, break every obstacle, and realize the dreams of maturity, of which we are as yet scarcely conscious.²⁷

Likewise, the horizons of advanced capitalism usher in the need for a totalist Marxism. It has been argued that the rise of

automated and cybernetic technology and the political system of advanced capitalism make Marx's work obsolete. On the contrary, the rise of a technology sophisticated enough to make disaccumulation possible is a central premise for the full realization of Marxian socialism. Although this point has not yet penetrated popular understanding, Marx was aware of this premise and understood its centrality to his conception of revolution. (This point is implicit throughout Marx, but becomes all the more clear upon consulting the still untranslated *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Oekonomie*).²⁸ Still, beyond providing a critical method and historical understanding, Marx's own work obviously cannot and does not provide an adequate account of contemporary reality. Marxism must change with the changes in capitalism or it will become a mere ideology. In short, the New Left, on the threshold of calling into being a new model of socialist politics, must create a new understanding of Marxism, must make Marxism possible in advanced industrial society. In this process a reexamination and rehabilitation of the Marxism of the unknown dimension is inevitable, for in their attempt to develop Marx's work during an era without hope the underground Marxists glimpsed the political themes and horizons of social change today.²⁹

IV. The Unrecognizable Marxism

In the late 1950s Jean-Paul Sartre wrote:

Marxism, after drawing us to it as the moon draws the tides, after transforming all our ideas, after liquidating the categories of our bourgeois thought, abruptly left us stranded . . . it no longer had anything new to teach us, because it had come to a stop. Marxism stopped Marxism possesses theoretical bases, it embraces all human activity; but it no longer *knows* anything.³⁰

Although Sartre's statement overlooks revolutionary developments in the Third World, it rings true as a description of the situation of Marxism in Europe (to the extent that the underground currents of Western Marxism have remained in obscurity). It certainly stands as a characterization of American Marxism, which did not experience even the beginnings of the revival of Marxism that occurred in Europe in the 1960s.

The challenge facing the current generation of Marxists in this country is whether the singular nature of American circumstances can become the spur to the creation of a Marxism that equals in originality and daring that historical uniqueness. In the past, American Marxism, trapped in orthodoxy, sought for the most part to compress and collapse the richness of history into formulas imported from Germany, the U.S.S.R., and, more recently, China. Can this heritage be reversed? What would be the underpinnings of a revitalized American Marxism?

No comprehension of American reality is possible without an understanding of the way in which the suppression of internal minorities through racism and of the Third World through imperialism have decisively shaped every aspect of American society, culture, and politics. One cannot stress this point enough. American Marxism has missed the boat in regard to the problem of racism. The New Left has turned, as it must, in other directions—to the writings of Ernesto Ché Guevara, Mao Tsetung, Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, and others. The impact of the black movement and the Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions on the birth and growth of the predominantly white student New Left has been crucial. One might note in passing that it is no accident that what is probably the outstanding contribution of American Marxism, W. E. B. DuBois' monumental *Black Reconstruction in America*, was written outside its mainstream by a black man who had plunged to the depths of this country's history of racism.

Closely connected with the foregoing is the danger of creating a Marxism that is concerned only with the most future-oriented trends of advanced capitalism and has lost sensitivity to the situation of the mass of people still caught up in the misery resulting from the more familiar contradictions of class-society. Different approaches will have to overlap. Thus, on the one hand, critical theory in the age of disaccumulation should point out that current technological potentials make the work ethic of capitalist culture outdated. Yet it must never be forgotten that for most of the world's people back-breaking work is the only way their countries will escape from the underdevelopment and poverty that the imperialist powers created and maintain. A theory that single-mindedly stresses the end of alienation in one country at a time when that country is the hegemonic world power cannot be described as "Marxist." Likewise, the "new working class"

theories are right to point out the impact of the new technological systems on the proletariat, but these theories must be qualified since the large mass of the working class is still engaged in the drudgery, sweat, and problems of precybernetic labor.

The achievements of women's liberation cast light on another challenge to any possible future Marxism. The male-dominated, prodigy-oriented model of scholarship and theory-building that has prevailed in the past must be transcended if the idea of abolishing the distinction between intellectual and other forms of work is to be taken seriously. To the extent that Marxism takes the critique of everyday life seriously, that critique must emerge from everyday life. That is, theory must emerge from the experiences and reflections of everyday people.

The most difficult problem will be going beyond the philosophical premises of Marxism (as preserved in the underground tradition) toward the creation of a new social theory of American society, a new method of social analysis, a "critical science" of social *praxis*. As Sartre pointed out: Marxism has theoretical premises, but it doesn't "know anything," a statement especially true of American Marxism. Any future Marxism must incorporate a multitude of disciplines and methods of apprehending reality that it has hitherto ignored. It is essential that psychoanalysis, social history, and the history of popular culture, to name a few, be critically integrated into Marxism to enhance the sensitivity and resolution of its phenomenology of everyday life and to deepen its understanding of the social underpinnings of the major political and economic institutions. The integration of these disciplines cannot be an eclectic "synthesis" of various social theories. What is needed is nothing short of a major methodological breakthrough to fuse Marxism's dialectical premises with the modes of social analysis it needs to adequately comprehend social change in late capitalist society.

The development of critical theory presupposes the existence of a negating political practice. An adequate understanding of the contradictions of late capitalism will come only when those social forces bring into being the agents of their own negation—that is, when the victims of bourgeois society actively seek its overthrow. In the absence of agents of social change whose *praxis* reveals the horizons of late capitalism and the historical alternatives, critical theory is relegated to paralyzed abstraction. To some extent negating political practice has begun to appear, thereby

making possible the rise of a new Marxism adequate to the uniqueness of our circumstances.

One must agree with Sartre that any comprehensive and historical theory of our situation today must find its place within Marxism. As the self-consciousness of even total, cultural revolution, Marxism is “the one philosophy of our time that we cannot go beyond” because the problems that brought Marxism into being (the oppression and suffering of class-society) have not been resolved.³¹ On the other hand, any Marxism that could be useful to us, that could genuinely be the precursor to the actualization of freedom, must be a Marxism that is in almost all respects unrecognizable. The struggles of our times have made imperative the task of creating it.

Notes

1. Ben Brewster, “Presentation of Gorz on Sartre,” *New Left Review* no. 37 (May–June 1966): 29 (my italics).
2. The term *critical theory* is used here to refer in a general sense to dialectical social thought, not as a reference to the specific work of the Frankfurt School (known as *Critical Theory* also).
3. The monumental notebooks for *Capital*, the so-called *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Oekonomie*, were first printed in 1939. Marx’s only comprehensive work in political theory, the *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, first appeared in 1927. The *German Ideology* and the celebrated *1844 Manuscripts* were first published in 1932.
4. Thus, Anderson notes that “it is a staggering fact that for two decades the only widely available book on Marx in English, apart from Party brochures, was Berlin’s haplessly ignorant and amateur little commentary [i.e., Isaiah Berlin’s *Karl Marx*] which achieved the feat of discussing Marx’s work without once mentioning the concept of ‘alienation,’ fundamental to the whole system.” (Perry Anderson, “Socialism and Pseudo-Empiricism,” *New Left Review* no. 35 [January–February 1966]: 26.)
5. This outline is, of course, highly schematic and should not lead us to overlook important questions that remain within the history of Marxism. Why is it, for example, that roughly between the completion of Marx’s active life and the writings of Rosa Luxemburg, a period of several decades, Marxism did not produce a lasting work of international significance?
6. The classic statements of these critiques of orthodox Marxism are in Lukács’ *History and Class Consciousness*, Korsch’s *Marxism and Philosophy*.

ophy, Gramsci's prison notebooks, Sartre's "Materialism and Revolution," and his *Critique de la raison dialectique* (which is the most thorough-going statement). See the "Question de Méthode," the first part of the *Critique*, translated by Hazel Barnes as *Search for a Method* (New York: Knopf, 1963).

7. Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (Berlin: Malik, 1923), 39. In reading what follows one should bear in mind the sharp dissociation Della Volpe and Althusser make from the "Hegelianized" trends within Marxism.
8. The roots of this approach can be found in Marx's "constitutive theory of consciousness," and above all in his concept of "Praxis," of men and women as the beings who produce and actualize themselves within a social totality of which they are the authors. Besides the primary sources, especially Lukács, Korsch, Sartre, etc., see these recent commentaries: Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); Dick Howard, *The Development of the Marxian Dialectic* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, forthcoming 1972); and Nathan Rotenstreich, *Basic Problems in Marx's Philosophy* (Indianapolis/New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965).
9. Herbert Marcuse, "Neue Quellen zur Grundlegung des historischen Materialismus" (1932), *Philosophie und Revolution, Aufsätze von Herbert Marcuse* (Berlin, 1967), pp. 96-97. Quoted in Paul Breines, "Notes on Lukács," *Telos* no. 5 (Spring 1970).
10. One of Rosa Luxemburg's most important contributions was her analysis of the way in which Marxist politics are destined to degenerate whenever the dialectical link between everyday practice and the ultimate future goal is weakened or severed. She is in many ways the crucial intellectual link between Marx and the underground tradition.
11. André Gorz, *Strategy for Labor* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 131-132.
12. See Antonio Gramsci, "Soviets in Italy," *New Left Review* no. 51 (September-October 1968). Also, Anton Pannekoek, *Workers Councils* (Cambridge: n.p., 1970).
13. Cf. Herbert Marcuse, "Foreword," to *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).
14. Breines, *op. cit.*, 29n. For the most part the works of the European Marxists were and are still unknown to the New Left in this country. In the early and mid-sixties some people had begun to read Marx's *Early Manuscripts* (first popularly introduced to the Anglo-American reader by Erich Fromm, a one-time associate of the Frankfurt School). A very few read Sartre, but Marcuse received a fairly wide reading, particularly with *One-Dimensional Man* and *Eros and Civilization*. André Gorz was also read somewhat: Carl Davidson's "The New Radicals in the Multiversity," and other prominent SDS pamphlets reflect his influence. *Studies on the Left*, *New Left Review*, and the Socialist Scholars Conference introduced people to Gramsci, Sartre, and Lukács. On the whole, however, the overwhelming bulk of the activists had no direct contact with European Marxism.

15. The most substantial effort thus far is Massimo Teodori's excellent *The New Left: A Documentary History* (Indianapolis/New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969). For help in tracking down primary sources see James O'Brien, "A History of the New Left, 1960-1968," *Radical America* (May/June, September/October, and November/December, 1968); Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood Is Powerful* (New York: Vintage, 1970); and Mitchell Goodman, ed., *The Movement toward a New America* (New York/Philadelphia: Knopf/Pilgrim Press, 1970).
16. Another urgently needed task is the writing of a comparative history of the New Left. For background information see Stuart Dowsey, ed., *Zengakuren: Japan's Revolutionary Students* (Berkeley: Ishi Press, 1970); and Barbara and John Ehrenreich, *Long March, Short Spring* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969). *New Left Review* has published substantial articles on the student movements in France, Britain, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Argentina, Spain, and elsewhere.
17. William Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York: Vintage, 1968). See also, Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*, 2nd. ed. (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968).
18. André Gorz, "Reform and Revolution," in Ralph Miliband and John Saville, eds., *The Socialist Register 1968* (New York/London: Monthly Review Press/Merlin, 1968), p. 125.
19. Herbert Marcuse, *Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 25-26.
20. Thus, for example, Gramsci's massive investigations of Italian culture; the concern with the philosophy and sociology of art throughout the work of Ernst Bloch; Lukács' *Aesthetics*, *Theory of the Novel*, and many volumes of literary criticism; Sartre's criticism, his studies of Jean Genêt and Gustave Flaubert, his focus on the psychology of the imagination, and his own plays and novels; Adorno's myriad literary essays and the numerous volumes in the sociology of music; the decisive impact of Friedrich Schiller and the Surrealists on Marcuse's social theory; the literary work, aesthetics, and poetry of Hermann Gorter and Henriette Roland-Holst; and of course Walter Benjamin's lifework. Surrealism and other artistic currents profoundly influenced the unknown Marxism earlier in this century.
21. One must note in passing that even a thinker of Reich's originality maintained what I consider to be an indefensible attitude toward homosexuality.
22. We should note the influence of the new movements in the United States on Europe. Obviously the impact of the black uprisings of recent years on the current generation in Europe has been profound, not only as a political example but in shattering European illusions about what the French call "le American Way of Life." These currents, and the newer influences of women's liberation and gay liberation, must lead to a re-thinking of all the categories of European socialist theory (there is some evidence that this process has begun, but it has a long way to go). Although I would argue that the underground Marxism makes a

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- significant contribution to expanding the scope of Marxism, there is no doubt that it has been, for all purposes, blind (as has all European thought) to the questions now so forcefully put by women and minority cultures.
22. David Cooper, "Introduction," to *To Free a Generation: Dialectics of Liberation* (New York: Collier, 1969), pp. 9-10.
 23. It is an irony that one of the few areas in which American Marxism has produced a strong theoretical foundation is in the understanding of material underdevelopment—through the excellent contributions of Paul Baran, Paul Sweezy, Harry Magdoff, Andre Gunder Frank, et al. Yet until recently almost no attention was paid to the underdevelopment of human relations, the theory of alienation, etc.
 24. Martin Sklar, "On the Proletarian Revolution and the End of Political-Economic Society," *Radical America*, vol. 3, no. 3 (May-June, 1969).
 25. *Ibid.*, 9 (italics omitted).
 26. On the theory of corporate liberalism see the work of William A. Williams, Gabriel Kolko, and the group around *Studies on the Left*, including Ronald Radosh, Martin Sklar, and James Weinstein. See especially James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State 1900-1918* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), and David Eakins and James Weinstein, eds., *For a New America: Essays in History and Politics from "Studies on the Left" 1959-1967* (New York: Random House, 1970). The theory of corporate liberalism is one of the major and genuinely original theoretical contributions of the American New Left.
 27. Tom Nairn and Angelo Quattrocchi, *The Beginning of the End* (London: Panther Books, 1968), p. 155. (See also Tom Nairn, "McLuhanism: The Myth of Our Time," in Raymond Rosenthal, ed., *McLuhan: Pro and Con* [Baltimore: Penguin, 1968].)
 28. Michael Harrington describes the relevant passages from Marx's *Grundrisse* as "utterly contemporary in the age of cybernation which began approximately one hundred years after Marx wrote," (in *The Accidental Century* [Baltimore: Penguin, 1966], p. 266). Some brief translations appear in Nairn, *op. cit.*, pp. 160ff.; Martin Nicolaus, "The Unknown Marx," *New Left Review* no. 48 (March-April, 1968), pp. 41ff.; Gorz, *Strategy For Labor*, 128ff.; Harrington, 266ff.; and Dick Howard: "Genetic Economics vs. Dialectical Materialism," *Radical America*, vol. 3, no. 4 (July/August, 1969), and "On Marx's Critical Theory," *Telos* no. 6 (Fall, 1970). See also Martin Nicolaus, "Proletariat and Middle Class in Marx: Hegelian Choreography and the Capitalist Dialectic," *Studies on the Left*, vol. 7, no. 1 (January-February 1967) for access to the strikingly modern insights in Marx's other multi-volume unknown text, the *Theories of Surplus Value*. As this book went to press, a brief selection from the *Grundrisse* was published entitled *The Grundrisse*, ed. by David McLellan (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).
 29. The case for a culturally oriented, totalistic Marxism, and hence for the rehabilitation of the underground tradition, is particularly enhanced

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by the peculiar historical development of capitalism in the United States. For a series of reasons, which cannot be developed here, the problems of the cultural hegemony of the capitalist class and of the culture of racism have been persistently central to American history. Because of America's wealth and empire, the dominant class has hardly ever been at a loss for room for maneuver, which it has used repeatedly and with great confidence, coherence, and foresight. The power of the dominant class, its view of the world, and its way of life, have been diffused and decentralized throughout the institutions and consciousness of society. Conversely, the dominated classes in American society have been highly differentiated, divided by race, occupation, ethnicity, language, sex, and generation. Above all, the unique history of American slavery has placed racial conflict at the center of American life. As a result, the American working class, although it has had many heroic moments, has persistently failed to generate a shared culture of its own or a comprehensive alternative vision of society, and its radical movements have thereby suffered, often ending in futility. Given the central nature of the critique of consciousness to revolutionary social change in the United States, only a theory that makes the culture of daily life its point of departure can generate a comprehensive understanding of the horizons of advanced capitalism in this country. From this follows the special relevance of Gramsci's work. For a more detailed, but still preliminary, development of these arguments on American history, see Frank Brodhead, Ed Greer, Amy Kesselman, Karl Klare, and Ruth Meyerowitz, "Towards a Socialist Strategy for the United States," paper delivered at the Sixth Annual Socialist Scholars Conference, New York, June 14, 1970.

30. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, *op. cit.*, pp. 21, 28.
31. *Ibid.*, p. xxxiv.

2

The Historical Context

Dick Howard

Among the most often cited lines of Karl Marx are those from the *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past.” But the sentence immediately following is often left uncited: “The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.” Paradoxically, the tradition weighs both through its presence and its absence; and one of the mechanisms by which the bourgeoisie preserves its hegemony is the theft, adulteration, and ultimate falsification of an authentic revolutionary tradition. To reclaim that tradition is to rediscover one’s own historical being-in-the-world, and the possibility of changing it. If we cannot recognize ourselves and our hopes in what has been given us as a “revolutionary tradition,” then perhaps we should not doubt ourselves, but interrogate history in order to discover if, and how, and why, we have been deceived. We should ask too, what were the circumstances that prevented the realization of the tradition; what were the problems posed to it, and what problems did it pose?

I

On August 4, 1914, the parliamentary delegation of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) voted for the war credits asked by the Emperor, sealing the fate of the Second International, whose most powerful force it represented. It had been clear for more than a decade that the Second International was revolutionary only in word. Yet it was still the representative of the working class, and it increased its membership and parliamentary power each year. Those independent left-wing groups that thought about competing with it could gain little solace from the failure of the most important splinter within its ranks, the independent Dutch "Tribunists," led by Anton Pannekoek, Hermann Gorter, and Henriette Roland-Holst, who never counted more than 500 members before 1914, and had little influence on the working class. Rosa Luxemburg expressed the dominant feeling of the Left in a letter to Henriette Roland-Holst: "Your leaving the SDAP [the official Dutch Party] simply means your leaving the Social Democratic movement! That you may not do; that none of us may do! We may not stand outside the organization, out of contact with the masses. The worst workers' party is better than none."¹ This dilemma faced by the left of the Second International reappeared in the Third, Moscow-dominated International even more acutely due to the tighter organizational and ideological strictures of the latter.

In theory and rhetoric, the outbreak of an imperialist war had been expected by the socialist leaders. At the 1907 Stuttgart meeting of the International a resolution governing the proletarian response, introduced by Lenin and Luxemburg, was accepted, though not unanimously. As the crisis of 1914 built up, the Social Democratic press multiplied its warnings that the proletariat would not bear arms against its brothers. Then came August 4, and the patriotic furor of the masses in the defense of "fatherland" and "freedom." Rosa Luxemburg's illegally published *Junius Pamphlet* expresses the reaction of the left: the war is a turning point, and presents

the choice: Either the triumph of imperialism and the destruction of all culture and, as in ancient Rome, depopulation, desolation, degeneration, a vast cemetery. Or, the victory of socialism, that is, the conscious struggle

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of the international proletariat against imperialism and its method: war. This is the dilemma of world history, an Either/Or whose scales are trembling in the balance, awaiting the decision of the class conscious proletariat. . . . If the proletariat learns from this war to exert itself, to cast off its serfdom to the ruling classes, to become the lord of its own destiny, the shame and misery will not have been in vain.²

The conferences at Kienthal and Zimmerwald, and the actions of the determined minority of Spartacists, Bolsheviks, and others were the first stages of a reevaluation and renewal.

The antiwar actions of the minority were taken up in February 1917 by those of the Russian people, wearied of war and longing for peace and a new order. Following the tradition of 1905, the workers and soldiers spontaneously formed *soviets*, workers' and soldiers' councils, expressing and carrying out the popular will in a direct democracy. The ineptitude of the Kerensky government, and the momentum of the masses themselves, served as the catalyst leading the Bolsheviks to power in October 1917. Here, it seemed, was the first phase of the world revolution; the masses had indeed learned from the debacle of imperialist war, and a new era of world history had dawned. The Bolshevik revolution seemed to be the reply to the reformist weakness of the Second International, the soviet government was the hope of the future and the rejection of the false paths which had led to war. With the Russian Revolution was born the spirit of a new International.

The subsequent degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the International it founded is well known. The course of the revolution in Russia puts into question not simply the Stalinist phase, but more fundamentally it demands a reflection on the *Leninist model*, in theory and in practice. The problem, as Sartre notes, is that "we cannot indiscriminately form the young by teaching them successful errors. What would happen if materialism one day stifled the revolutionary project?"³ Ultimately, the entire edifice of "Marxism," as it has been handed down to us, must be called into question. This reevaluation, in the changing historical conditions since the success of 1917, is the common denominator of the essays presented in this book.

The "unknown dimension" is not a single, unified theory. It is perhaps better defined as a mood, an attitude towards a present shot through with futurity. As treated in this book, the

"unknown dimension" appears to be a *white, Western* phenomenon. This, however, is by no means the case. The mood and attitude presented here can be seen in all those liberation struggles which, refusing the rigid schematism of what has been codified as "Marxism," insist on the objective uniqueness of material lived experience in their own arena of struggle as well as the central role of human subjectivity not simply as a means to a revolutionary end, but as that very end itself. It would be wrong, then, to interpret the "unknown dimension" as prescriptive for a modern revolutionary theory and practice. The persistence of this mood and attitude does show, however, that there are alternatives to the orthodox "Marxism" which has now become an ideology.

II

Born as a reaction to the practical failures of the Second International, the Third International did not differ fundamentally in its theoretical foundations from its predecessor. This assertion may seem surprising. It is usually thought that the Bolshevization process and the continual struggles against Social Democracy (which takes on a pejorative sense only after 1917) indicate a fundamental difference between the two Internationals. The Second International is usually thought of as the representative of "democratic socialism," while the Third is seen as "centralist" and "manipulative" because of its adoption of the Leninist theory of the party. These differences, however, are only formal; they do not imply a fundamentally different notion of socialism, but only two roads to the same end. In other words, the differences between the two Internationals was tactical only, as is seen, for example, in their views on the role of the party—supposedly an important innovation of Lenin's. Lenin's position stems from his theory that revolution must be brought to the workers from without. However, as Karl Korsch shows, this function of the party had already been stressed by Karl Kautsky, whose "profoundly correct and significative words" Lenin cites in *What Is to Be Done?* to the effect that socialist consciousness does not arise directly from the struggles of the working class, and that the "science" needed by the proletariat is possessed by "bourgeois intellectuals" "in whose heads contemporary socialism was born

. . . and communicated to the most intellectually developed proletarians.”⁴ Before we look at the historical origins of the Third International, the nature of the “science” developed for and given to the proletariat by the theoreticians of the Second International must be considered, for it is crucial to an understanding of the theoretical struggles of the postwar period.

The theoretical leaders of the SPD had personally known Marx and Engels, and the latter had been their theoretical guide and conscience until his death in 1895. But, facing the daily problems of building a political movement, the SPD leaders came more and more to rely on what one of them, Ignaz Auer, called “practicism.” Theory became a revolutionary cover-up for their day-to-day reformism. The lengths to which their “practicality” drove them can be seen in the fate of Engels’ famous 1895 Preface to the reissue of Marx’s *Class Struggles in France*. Not wanting to risk a government repression, Engels’ Preface was “edited” so as to make it appear that the only possible course for the SPD was the parliamentary-reformist route.⁵ By having the old revolutionary say this, they covered their reformism in his revolutionary mantle, and the tactics laid down in their version of the preface governed SPD politics until 1914.

The practical politics of the SPD and its trade union twin were highly successful. Membership grew to over one million in 1914. In 1912 the SPD elected 110 representatives to the Reichstag, winning 34.8 per cent of the vote.⁶ There were Socialist organizations for sports and gymnastics, cycling, swimming, rowing, athletics, singing, tourism, hiking, and even a temperance group. There were Socialist women’s organizations, schools, and a central cadre-training school. For its members, the rhetoric of the socialist future was felt with near religious fervor. A 1912 survey records statements like: “I am not without hope, for one who is so filled with socialism as myself believes in a liberation like a new Evangile” (a twenty-nine-year-old metal worker); and, “It was the political and trade union movement which first gave a goal to my being, a content to my life” (a thirty-nine-year-old metal worker).⁷

With its success in the practical domain, the SPD increasingly became an end in itself, a substitute for the revolution. Its rhetoric remained revolutionary, but its actions were governed by the leaders’ fear for their slowly built and precious organization. The organization became a fetish; from a means it became an

end. Rosa Luxemburg's polemic with the bureaucratic trade union leaders who feared even to discuss the mass strike points out some of the causes of the situation.⁸ Especially important was the fact that Social Democracy's cradle-to-grave, all-encompassing presence in the life of the workers gave to these pariahs of bourgeois society a new feeling of belonging, a home within the nation, an identity, and, in the last analysis, a kind of religion and false-consciousness. Focusing on the party as an end, its integration in the social totality was neglected, and the possibility of a debacle like August 4, 1914 was created.

At the root of this fetishism of the organization lay the belief that the revolution would come as a natural event in the course of social evolution. The Marxism of the SPD was strongly tinged with a Darwinian belief in the "scientific" necessity of the socialist victory—a belief to which Engels himself was prone, and which is reflected in his widely read and influential *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, as well as his posthumous *Dialectics of Nature*. The "Marxism" on which the SPD leaders based their actions was indebted more to Engels than to Marx, whose death in 1883 occurred before the Party's rise in influence.⁹ This kind of socialist Darwinism, mediated by the scientific popularizations of Büchner, Haekel, Vogt, and others, seemed useful as anti-Christian, anti-idealist propaganda, helping the workers persevere in the early stages of organizing when they were a minority even among their own, giving them faith in the ultimate victory. The statistical records of different union libraries show that these popularizers were far more frequently read than even Marx and Engels. The Darwinian faith was not simply working class naiveté. The well-known philosophy professor, Karl Vorländer, argued in his pamphlet "Marx and Kant" that the essence of the Marxian dialectic is Darwinian.

The result of the belief in the "scientific" necessity of socialism can be seen in the strategy of the SPD. The Party's theoretical leader, Karl Kautsky, argued: "Our task is not to organize the revolution but rather to organize ourselves for the revolution; not to *make* the revolution, but to *use* it."¹⁰ In the discussion of the active mass strike, as the radicals around Rosa Luxemburg and Anton Pannekoek's Bremen group presented it, the old leadership's arguments were governed by the vision of socialism as a "natural necessity" which would come only if the SPD didn't rock the boat. The guiding document of the SPD, the

Erfurt Program, distinguishing sharply between the final goals of the movement and the day-to-day tactics employed, reflects this theoretical position. Since the breakdown of capitalist society was "scientifically" necessary, the Socialists' task was to prepare their organization to weather the storm and take power. The stress was put on the objective, not the subjective aspect of revolution.

This Darwinized "scientific" socialism carried with it the neglect of the dialectic. No one contradicted the delegate at the 1899 Hannover Congress who asserted: "In our agitation, let us rather put in the place of the 'dialectic' the more precise and more comprehensive concept of 'development' which is more understandable to the workers. Bebel cited the great Darwin. We are closer to him than to Hegel."¹¹ The hostility to the dialectic is clear in Eduard Bernstein's "revision" of Marxism. Bernstein argued that Marx's theory contained certain remnants of Blanquist doctrine due to Marx's reliance on the dialectical method, which saw revolution and not gradual evolution as leading to socialism. Though, as the defender of orthodoxy, Kautsky had to pay lip-service to the dialectic, he admitted that "philosophy was never my strong side,"¹² as is clear from even the slightest acquaintance with his work. *Capital*, that most dialectical of works, was interpreted in Kautsky's popularization as an economics textbook according to whose iron "laws" the eventual breakdown would occur.

The anti-Hegel stance of the party was accompanied by a rising admiration for Kant. This tendency can be seen already in the 1870s, when the value theory of Volume I of *Capital* was understood as a polemic against exploitation, not as a scientific but as an ethical device. With the appearance of Volume III (1894), whose theory of prices seemed to contradict the value theory of Volume I, this tendency was strengthened. Ethical Marxism was typified by the leader of the Marburg Neo-Kantians, Hermann Cohen, who argued that the Kantian categorical imperative can only be realized in Socialist society, where man will always be treated as an end, never as a means, where exploitation will cease and a new ethical era will begin.¹³ In an Afterword to F. A. Lange's *History of Materialism*, Cohen sees Kant as "the true and actual founder of German socialism."¹⁴ Not only did Kantian philosophers claim to be Marxists; Marxist politicians claimed to be Kantians. Eduard David, addressing the Reichstag

on the one-hundredth anniversary of Kant's death, insisted that the SPD was the only political party that attempted to realize the Kantian ethical postulates.¹⁵ The problem with this position is that socialism as a kind of ideal or utopian future becomes a paradise; Socialists become a kind of "chosen people" who must bear the burden of bringing the Truth to the masses. Paradoxically, the scientific stress on objective development brings forth this idealistic ethic of pure subjective striving; materialism becomes mechanism, the dialectic becomes a subjective idealism, and the advance of Marx over German idealism, which enabled him to mediate theory and *praxis*, is lost.

The ethical strain in the Marxism of the SPD was compatible with a certain kind of evolutionary doctrine, but not with the mystifications contained in the vainglorious rhetoric that still insisted on the "great Kladderadatsch," as August Bebel referred to the breakdown, which would bring down the house. The contradiction between the rhetoric and day-to-day politics led Eduard Bernstein to write his revisionist critique, *The Presuppositions of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy* (English edition: *Evolutionary Socialism*), whose motto is taken from Schiller's *Maria Stuart*: "That which it is it should dare to appear." Bernstein submitted Marxian theory and Social Democratic practice to a severe critique for what he saw to be its false-consciousness. Bernstein's views stirred up a storm in the Party. The feelings of the Party leaders were summed up in the practical Auer's famous letter to Bernstein: "My dear Ede. What you demand is not formally decided. One does not say such things—one does them."¹⁶ Formal resolutions were voted against revisionism at Hannover in 1899 and in succeeding years—with little effect, since even the most inveterate practitioners of the reformist tactics that Bernstein prescribed voted against the theoretical expression of their actions. Bernstein himself insisted at the 1903 Dresden Congress that "in my opinion the revision is located in the domain of theory, not in that of practical action."¹⁷

While he was wrong in his "revision" of Marx, Bernstein's challenge to the SPD to dare appear as it actually was—a democratic reform party—got at the truth of Party life. Practical politics had the upper hand, and the Party's leaders could easily agree with Bernstein's famous aphorism: "For me, the final goal is nothing, the movement is everything." The socialism of the SPD was the grey busy-work of thousands of permanent party and

union bureaucrats; the role of the masses was minimal. This was the bourgeois, moralistic “socialism” against which Nietzsche had railed years before; and it was on the basis of his experience as a member of the SPD that Robert Michels developed his “iron law of oligarchy.” At the same time, the bourgeois society of the *fin de siècle* was alive with intellectual movements stimulated by a growing malaise. This was the period when Nietzsche was discovered; Dilthey was studying the young Hegel and developing his own philosophy of history; Bergson was elaborating his notion of the *élan vital*; and Husserlian phenomenology was stressing the active intentionality of the subject in its return “to the things themselves.” Artistic innovations rejecting bourgeois values and life-style came alive in movements like the Expressionists and Futurists. Freud developed his psychoanalytic method with its recognition of the role of sexuality and repression. One could go on, but the point is clear: Social Democracy, as Hegel might have predicted, had been determined by its negative, capitalist society; it offered no possibility of a solution to what was felt as an existential crisis.¹⁸

The role that Rosa Luxemburg played within the Second International, and even after her murder, cannot be overemphasized. She was the only international Socialist leader whose stature was equal to that of Lenin; moreover, she had criticized Lenin in 1904 and again in 1918. For this reason, her name was to become a political football in the factional fights within and without the Third International.

A leader of the antirevisionist attack in 1898 and of the left wing of the SPD, Rosa Luxemburg participated in the 1905 Revolution in Russia, returning to Germany convinced that the Mass Strike tactic developed in 1905 could be used to break the ossified structures of the SPD and permit mass action by the workers themselves. The preconditions for the Mass Strike, she argued, were being created by the imperialist phase of capitalism. A member of the International Bureau, she and Lenin fought together at the Stuttgart Congress of the International to bring home the importance of imperialism and the risk of war carried with it. In her book, *The Accumulation of Capital*, she made an original contribution to the Marxian theory of imperialism, attempting to rethink the circulation schemas of Volume II of *Capital* in the light of modern conditions. A leading member of the antiwar group that founded the Spartacus League shortly after

the outbreak of the war, she spent most of the war years in “preventive detention” and was released in time to take part in the 1918-1919 revolution in Germany. When the Spartacus League decided to break with the Independent Socialists and form the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), Rosa Luxemburg went along with them but attempted to cool their romantic ardor, arguing that revolution cannot be made in one blow, and that, therefore, participation in the Constituent Assembly was necessary; the revolution, she insisted, would be a long process during which, in struggle, the masses would make themselves ready for socialism and in making themselves ready for it would make it a reality. But the radical faction won, and participation was condemned. After a week of bloody revolt in Berlin, she and Karl Liebknecht were murdered by soldiers under the official command of a “socialist” SPD government.

Rosa Luxemburg’s political theory and practice showed an instinctive understanding of the dialectic.¹⁹ From the first to the last, she stressed that revolution is not merely the seizure of state power and the socialization of the means of production; it is more, and other. Socialism is based on the masses, on the proletariat, which is the subject-object of history. She argued that, in the Leninist view of the party, “the mass of comrades are denigrated to a mass incapable of judging, whose essential virtue becomes ‘discipline,’ that is, passive obedience to duty.”²⁰ In a socialist revolution, she insisted, “the masses will be the active chorus, and the leaders only the ‘speaking parts,’ the interpreters of the will of the masses.”²¹ And later: “Socialism will not and cannot be created by decrees; nor can it be established by any government, however socialistic. Socialism must be created by the masses, by every proletarian. Where the chains of capitalism are forged, there they must be broken. Only that is socialism, and only thus can socialism be created.”²² The subjective factor, the class consciousness of the masses, is what makes socialism. “The Social Democratic movement is the first in the history of class societies which, in all its moments, in its entire course, reckons on the organization and independent direct action of the masses.”²³ For Rosa Luxemburg, “only the working class, by its own activity, can make the word flesh.”²⁴ True, the revolution depends on objective conditions created by capitalism; but these alone do not suffice. Without the subjective factor, the class consciousness of the proletariat, there may be a change in government,

or even in property relations; but that is not socialism. The proletariat does not acquire class consciousness from reading books nor from listening to intellectuals; it learns in the school of action. Against Bernstein's fears of a revolution coming too soon, Rosa Luxemburg argued that every revolution comes "too soon," but that only in the experience of the struggle for power does the proletariat get the capacities that enable it, finally, to hold power and end the class society.²⁵ Thus, on the last day of her life, in the ruins of one stage of the German revolution, she wrote that "revolution is the only form of 'war' . . . in which the final victory can only be prepared by a series of 'defeats.' "²⁶

The failure of the SPD to adopt the mass strike tactic, and the trade unions' practical veto on discussion of it, made it clear that the left had little chance of changing the tactics of the leaders. During the 1907 elections, the bourgeois parties campaigned against the SPD on an imperialist platform, attacking the SPD as "the enemy within." In these so-called Hottentot elections, the SPD was soundly beaten, and the practical-minded leaders took note of the tendency of the electorate. SPD tactics became even more moderate, and Kautsky, hitherto counted among the left, showed his colors in his reformist programmatic statement, *The Road to Power*. The left was isolated and found it difficult to find platforms from which to express its views. Despite the imminence of imperialist war, the Party continued its humdrum existence—right on into the war, in fact, when on August 4 it traded its votes and a "social peace" for the duration against certain trade union and electoral privileges.

III

The major determinants of the immediate postwar years were (a) the success and then the further growth and changes of the Russian Revolution, and (b) the failure of revolution in the West and the subsequent "Bolshevization" of the Western Communist Parties, which split and weakened the working-class movement, and ultimately led to the fratricidal follies of "Social Fascism." The possibilities that these events opened, and those that they closed, cast light on the choices and problems posed by the theoreticians of the times.

The October Revolution was a world-shaking event whose

tremors and aftermath are still felt. In the midst of a senseless war based on a strategy that called for nothing short of mass murder, it is easy to understand the hopes it kindled and the fears it raised. At last, the international proletariat had vindicated itself; here was the first act in the world revolution. The masses had proven that they were not mindless cannon fodder; they had taken their fate in their hands and established soviets, a new form of workers' government. The idea of the soviets spread like wild-fire. No instruction manuals were needed—the workers knew instinctively what to do. This spontaneous formation of workers' councils marked the postwar risings in Germany, Hungary, Italy, and elsewhere; "All power to the Soviets" was a slogan everyone could feel and understand.

The October Revolution was a victory over the evolutionary greyness and passivity of the Second International in both theory and in practice. Antonio Gramsci hailed it as the "Revolution against *Capital*" because it broke with the consecrated theory that society had to pass through a bourgeois democratic phase before reaching the socialist stage. As opposed to the Social Democratic insistence that the bourgeois state could be captured intact and used for socialist ends, the October Revolution returned to the insights Marx had drawn from the Paris Commune. The bourgeois state must be destroyed, and new proletarian forms must be developed; this was the lesson drawn by Lenin in *State and Revolution*, written in the midst of the struggle. Though it is true that it was the Bolshevik Party and not the soviets that actually seized power, the formal allegiance to the soviets in this period implied a stress on the independent activity and creative potential of workers' self-government. The soviets captured the imagination; by their very existence they affirmed that the hegemony of bourgeois ideas over an atomized, passive mass was at an end. Finally, all of this took place within the context of an imperialist war, and it was seen as only the first act in a drama that would change the face of the world.

The Bolsheviks knew that without a revolution in the West, particularly in Germany, their own revolution could not achieve its goals.²⁷ Events proved them right. Weary of war and inspired by the Russian example, the German workers and soldiers rose, forcing the Emperor to abdicate on November 9, 1918. The events that followed, however, differed from the Russian precedent. The German radicals were a small, weakly organized minority. More

important, the majority of the working class was still obedient to the old SPD, with its large and efficient bureaucracy and trade union affiliates. What took place had been predicted by Bernstein twenty years before: "If in the near future some event were to place the power in the hands of Social Democracy, the gaping difference between the presuppositions of our theory and reality would appear in its full dimensions."²⁸

The SPD quickly established its control over the workers' councils. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were not permitted to present their views, on the grounds that "they were neither workers nor soldiers." Concerned with legality, the SPD called for the election of a Constituent Assembly. Meanwhile, the councils' government limited itself to the passage of a number of economic reforms, all of which had been in the pre-1914 SPD program: unemployment compensation, coalition rights, the eight-hour day, and even a limited workers' participation. To those who called for more radical measures, the SPD replied that in troubled times economic experiments were too dangerous. The SPD had the power but did not know how to use it, how to transfer it to the people. Within two years the power was lost.

The left, organized in the Spartacus League, attempted to take advantage of the spontaneous energy of the masses. At the end of 1918, the Communist Party of Germany (Spartacus) was founded. The left wing of the new Party was impassioned by the Bolshevik experience and expected immediately to transfer it unchanged to Germany. They opposed participation in the Constituent Assembly, stressing, as Anton Pannekoek put it, "the need to free oneself from the spiritual dependence on parliamentary representatives . . . because one now saw ahead the way to one's own action in the building of the council system."²⁹ The group around Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and Paul Levi stressed the differences with Russia and the limitations inherent in German conditions, particularly the hold of the SPD over the masses. The Party, however, opted for an activist program. A revolt took place in Berlin in January, only to be crushed by the reactionary *Freikorps* called in by the SPD Minister Noske.

Several other short-lived revolutions broke out immediately after the Russian Revolution, each showing the same traits of working-class spontaneity and the formation of workers' councils. In Bavaria, under the leadership of Kurt Eisner, a Soviet Republic was declared but quickly crushed in March 1919. In Austria,

all the ingredients for a similar experience were present, but the Austrian Socialists, led by Otto Bauer, prevented the rising.³⁰ In Hungary, Bela Kun's Communist Party came to power in March 1919 and formed a Soviet Republic, which lasted for almost six months. Here again, a combination of allied intervention, peasant reaction, and the wavering attitude of the Social Democratic Party led to the defeat of the Communist government.

These failures in the West added to the burdens of the Russian Revolution, and ultimately changed its nature. Already devastated by the World War, Russia was in the throes of civil war. The most devoted and experienced Communists were pressed into state and military service. The system of "War Communism" was imposed on the country to prevent starvation and chaos. The role of the state increased and that of the soviets diminished. The composition of the Bolshevik Party itself changed radically with the loss of experienced comrades on the battlefields or in the bureaucracy. The flood of new members who replaced them were not of the same quality, morally or intellectually. By the time the White armies had been defeated and the attempt to spread the revolution stopped at Warsaw in 1920, the Russian Revolution found itself in a situation very different from 1917.

In early March 1919, with the hopes of world victory still high, the Third International was founded in Moscow. Originally conceived in the euphoria of great expectations, its second Congress in July and August 1920 was a more sober affair. Already in October 1919, the Heidelberg Congress of the KPD had expelled its ultra-left as "revolutionary romantics," whose overly active politics were said to hurt the cause. In April and May 1920, Lenin added his support, writing *Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* in reply to the tactics of the ultra-left elaborated by Pannekoek, Bordiga, and others. The attack against the ultra-left was supplemented at the Second Congress by an attack against the Social Democrats and by the measures that would ultimately permit the Bolshevization of the International—the Twenty-one Conditions.³¹

While the Twenty-one Conditions laid the groundwork for the subordination of the Parties of the International to the interests of the Bolshevik Revolution, this subordination did not take place immediately. There was still a spirit of self-confidence and revolt among the workers, witnessed, for example, in the strike wave in Italy in which Antonio Gramsci's *Ordine Nuovo*

group played a key role. In Germany, this spirit was responsible for the defeat of the reactionary Kapp-Lüttwitz putsch of March 1920. Once again, however, the leaders of the SPD were unable to translate the evident power of the working class into social changes. As a result, in the elections of June 1920 the SPD lost more than half of its voters, and the Catholic Center Party came to power.

In conditions of revolutionary ferment, when the self-confidence of the workers is high, the politics of ultra-leftism have their greatest appeal. This was particularly the case in Germany during 1920 and early 1921, when a series of strikes in which the newly formed KAPD (*Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands*), composed of the ultra-leftists who had been expelled at the Heidelberg Congress, played a leading role. Lenin's attack on the ultra-left was an attempt to prevent the Third International from being outflanked on its left. The practical reaction of the International and the KPD was the attempted rising at Mansfeld in March 1921. Under the leadership of Bela Kun from the International, the revolt did not spread as expected and was quickly defeated. This defeat marked a downturn, after three years of struggle. It led to a change in the politics and leadership of the KPD; and with the decline of independent mass actions came a loss of influence for the ultra-left, marked by a series of splits concerning the necessity and role of a party and its relation to the trade unions.

The defeat of the German working class affected the entire International, and Russia as well. Within Russia, it coincided with the Kronstadt revolt and the Tenth Congress of the CPSU, at which the New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced. These three events led the Third Congress of the International in July and August 1921 to end the offensive period and adopt a frontist tactic of "union from below" with the Socialist Parties, supporting them, as Lenin put it, "like a rope the hanging man."

The Tenth Congress of the CPSU profoundly affected the politics and future of the Socialist movement. Already at the Ninth Congress Trotsky had argued in favor of the militarization of labor as the only way to raise the very low levels of productivity in Russia. It was proposed that the trade unions be subordinated to decisions of the party and that "experts" be used to make basic industrial decisions in the factories themselves. All vestiges of workers' control and soviet power would be ended, and the

workers would find themselves again in the position of wage slaves subject to a new form of exploitation. At the Ninth Congress, the "Democratic Centralism" group fought the Trotsky position to a stalemate. At the Tenth Congress, its place was taken by the "Workers' Opposition," under the leadership of Kollontaï and Shlyapnikov. The problem was resolved with the introduction of the NEP, a mixed economy that granted near-capitalist leeway to the peasants and capitalistic elements because that seemed to be the best way to build the economy.³² The decision was a difficult one, for it meant a retreat from the politics on which the revolution had been made. The leaders, however, saw no other possibilities, and the NEP was their attempt to make a virtue out of necessity, the first of many such moves.

Another fateful decision was taken at the Tenth Congress. It was resolved that in the difficult conditions of the time, a ban on factions within the Party should be introduced, and that the Central Committee should have the right of expulsion. Part of the reason for this decision was the Kronstadt revolt, which took place during the Tenth Congress. While it is difficult to know precisely whether Kronstadt was always controlled by true Left forces or was utilized by anti-soviet parties aided by Britain and France, it is clear that its original impulse came from the left. When one thinks of the situation in Russia at the time, both economically and politically, it is not difficult to understand the Kronstadters' demand for a "Third Revolution." Though the revolt was defeated in blood, the decisions that the Tenth Congress had taken in its face were to weigh heavily on the future of the Russian state.

With the introduction of the NEP, the International changed its tactics as well. The period of Frontism, consecrated at the Fourth Congress of the International in November and December 1922, also meant a policy of rapprochement with the Western governments whose trade and aid Russia needed. Russia signed the treaty of Rapallo with Germany, normalizing relationships and, as was revealed only later, actually providing aid and training for the reactionary German army. Mussolini's rise to power does not seem to have affected the politics of the International, whose major function was to aid Russian interests.

There was one more hope for the cause of international communism. Conditions had rapidly worsened in Germany. An inflation of unprecedented proportions had taken hold, to the point

that in October 1923 it took one trillion paper marks to buy one gold mark. The German government was unable to keep up its reparations payments and, because of this default, French and Belgian troops occupied the Ruhr. Now both the Left and the Right were up in arms against the Weimar system, which was identified with the SPD that had signed the Versailles Treaty. A small war raged in the streets. In Moscow, the leaders of the KPD joined the tactical bureau of the International to prepare an uprising. Planned for late October 1923, the rising was called off at the last minute. A local revolt in Hamburg was crushed, the Communist governments that had been in power for several months in Saxony and Thuringia were defeated, and the whole revolt failed. An ironic footnote was provided a few weeks later by the Hitler-Ludendorff Munich Putsch on November 8, 1923.

By the beginning of 1924, the last possibilities of imminent revolution in the West had disappeared. The German inflation was ended by the Dawes Plan, and the Ruhr was evacuated. A temporary new prosperity came to Germany and the world. This was the era of Locarno, of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, of bourgeois hope and illusion. On January 21, 1924, Lenin died, after a long illness. Later that year Stalin developed his argument for "Socialism in One Country" in his *Problems of Leninism*. At the Fifth Congress of the International in June and July 1924, it was proclaimed that "the Soviet Union . . . by the simple fact of its existence, drives a hole in the capitalist system by englobing within its own system, which is opposed by principle to the capitalist regime, one-sixth of the globe. On the other hand, it represents the most solid detachment of the working-class movement, for here the working class possesses all the means and sources of assistance which state power procures." The International had become the tool of Russian interests, and the role of the state was set above the independent action of the class.

IV

Sketched with the clarity permitted by hindsight, these historical details should not blind us to the real, existential choices faced by people at the time. Less than seven years had passed since the Russian Revolution, and the hopes to which it had given birth would die only slowly. Especially for intellectuals, whose

role it is to be the historical consciousness and conscience of the working class, the ferment of these seven years, with their hopes and disillusionments, weighed heavily.

The fact that the Bolsheviks *had* actually seized power impressed itself on the minds and imaginations of Western intellectuals. The mystique of the successful seizure of power was undoubtedly responsible for a large number of the adherents who flocked to the parties of the Third International after 1919. It would be erroneous to attribute the power of Moscow in the International to manipulation and power plays alone. The vast majority of Party members were more than willing to accept Moscow's word as law; after all, it was in Russia that The Revolution had been made. The subordination of the International to the will of Moscow carried with it a kind of "logic" based on the false-consciousness that, in the insecurity and isolation of capitalist "society," needs something to cling to. With the ebbing of the movement, this false-consciousness was reinforced, and obedience to Moscow, arising out of the hopeless material conditions of the present, became a religion, an "opium" of the revolutionary movement. Though Moscow did not create this false-consciousness, it did carefully cultivate it for its own ends, and for this it is responsible.

Moscow's domination did not go unchallenged. The ultra-left, which had been expelled from the Third International and castigated in Lenin's *Left Wing Communism*, riposted with the foundation of a Fourth, Communist Workers' International (the KAI). In Hermann Gorter's *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin*, the Bolshevik leader was taken to task for his insistence on imposing the Russian model on the West. Conditions in the West, Gorter insisted, demanded a different strategy. Lenin was accused of opportunism for his support of parliamentary tactics under certain conditions, and of subordinating the masses to his leadership instead of letting them develop their own initiative. A book like *Left Wing Communism*, wrote Gorter, "is for the revolutionary Communist proletariat what Bernstein's book was for the pre-revolutionary proletariat."³³ The revolution will not arise from an economic crisis alone, he argued; there is a further condition. "The examples of Germany, Hungary, Bavaria, Austria, Poland and the Balkans teach us that crisis and misery are not sufficient. The most terrible economic crisis is here—and yet the revolution has not come. There must be still another

factor which brings to existence the revolution and which, if it is absent, aborts or lets it fall. *This factor is the spirit of the masses.*³⁴

Gorter's reply to Lenin poses the central question: *What kind of power is seized in the proletarian revolution?* Gorter stresses what I would call the *Communist imperative*: "You must always act and speak in such a way as to awaken and fortify the class consciousness of the workers."³⁵ This imperative is crucial, for it implies that the revolution is a change in the men and women who make it, and that the subjective factor takes precedence over the objective changes that the revolution brings with it. It opposes the Leninist model, and it refuses to separate the end from the means. The proletariat is atomized and dominated by bourgeois ideology and the mystique of parliamentary democracy; only in struggle can they free themselves, demystifying and breaking the ideological and real chains that held them. This is why Pannekoek argued that the January 1919 revolt was necessary even though it failed, and why Rosa Luxemburg stressed the importance of "defeats" in the final proletarian victory: neither "victory" nor "defeat" can be written up on a balance sheet; socialism is the *totality* of the subjective and objective processes by which it is achieved; it is not a state but a becoming, not a sudden seizure of power, but a long process.

Many of the concrete problems faced by revolutionaries during this period had been anticipated in the Second International: the role of the Party and its relation to the masses; the function of the state during and after the seizure of power; the relation of action and consciousness, and that of the subjective and objective conditions of revolution; the role of parliamentary politics and that of the trade unions; and, the new variable, the function of the soviets, the workers' councils, which had first appeared in Russia in 1905. The answers given by the Third International closely parallel those of the Second: consistently, fatally, objective factors were given precedence over subjective ones. "Theories" were invented to make a virtue out of necessity, eventually developing the system of "Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism," which lost its living connection to the real movement and hardened into an ideology.

At the outset, the Russian Revolution seemed to break with the Second International's evolutionary belief that society must pass through a series of ascending stages before arriving at

socialism. The ideologues of the revolution, however, soon found it expedient to return to this "theory." At home, it "justified" war communism, then the NEP, and then, in 1928, the forced industrialization of the Five Year Plans. Abroad, it "justified" the Russian attitudes toward non-European revolutions, such as that of the Chinese. In its modified form, as the "weakest link theory," it "explained" the failures of the Communist parties acting under the direction of Moscow. The "stages theory" provided an ideal justification *ex post facto* for whatever Moscow wanted, since it is one of those theories that are nonfalsifiable by definition. If revolution came in the underdeveloped world and not in the West, it was explained in terms of the "weakest link theory," which was canonized at the Sixth Congress of the International in 1928. If it failed in one or both, the reason was "inadequate material development." Ignoring the subjective factor, this crude determination was nothing but a return to the economistic theory of evolutionary socialism, papered over with the rhetoric of 1917.

The "stages theory" had harmful consequences within Russia as well, for it justified first the dictatorship of the Party over the masses, and then the suppression of workers' control in favor of "expert" managers. Adherence to this doctrine compelled the party of Lenin and Stalin to follow the model and goals of capitalist economic development, accumulating capital on the shoulders of the workers and peasants. This internal variant of the "theory" not only further subordinated and depoliticized the working class and led to the growth of a bureaucratic caste of managerial experts, it also caused the Russian people great suffering during the stage of "primitive socialist accumulation," partly due to the usage of labor-intensive methods that imitated early capitalist patterns. This is an important point because, as is convincingly shown in Paul Baran's *The Political Economy of Growth*, it is often argued that the socialist form of accumulation is faster and more efficient than the capitalist variety, and that, *therefore*, the underdeveloped world should become Socialist. But, *socialism is more and other than mere accumulation*.

The conquest of political power in Russia was the work of the Bolshevik Party, which had utilized its tightly knit organization in the place and name of the soviets. During the Civil War and the reconstruction following it, the role of the Party increased continually. If one recalls the fate of the other revolutions that

took place between 1910 and 1920—the Mexican, Chinese, Turkish, and Irish, as well as the German, Bavarian, Hungarian,—the importance of the Bolsheviks and their methods cannot be under-emphasized. Yet, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the Republic of the Soviets, found itself isolated by the failure of the revolution to spread. By 1919 Lenin himself admitted that “the soviets, which according to their program are organs of direct administration *by the worker*, are instead organs of administration *for the workers*, led by the proletarian vanguard [i.e., the Bolshevik Party], not by the working masses.³⁶

By March 1921 the dictatorship of the Party was firmly established. The struggles of the Kronstadters and the Workers’ Opposition in Russia and the ultra-left within the International were fruitless. Theoretically this new dictatorship was easily justified by the Leninist theory of the Party, whose bases, as noted earlier, were borrowed from Kautsky. Since the proletariat is able to gain only a partial, trade union consciousness in its everyday struggles on the capitalist terrain, it is asserted that the party is the “true” consciousness of the class. The Party is said to have a view of the totality of the situation, and to be able to guide and coordinate the partial struggles of the particularized proletarian sectors. It is the intervention of the Party that transforms the economic struggles into a political struggle for state power. When the class struggle is latent, the Party’s parliamentary, propagandistic, or organizational activity is said to be the incarnation of the unconscious consciousness of the class. In other words, a subtle metaphysical transubstantiation occurs, and the Party becomes the incarnation of the working class. The class struggle is institutionalized, the Party bureaucratized, and the working class depoliticized.

The institutionalization of the “metaphysics of the Party” is commonly referred to as Stalinism. However, to put the entire blame on the shoulders of one man, however powerful and crafty, is no explanation of a social phenomenon. The roots of Stalinism lie, on the one hand, in the historical events that led to the isolation of Russia, and on the other hand in the “metaphysical” view of the Party taken over from the Second International and applied to the iron necessities of postrevolutionary Russia. The notion of “Lenin’s last struggle” against encroaching Stalinism, recently popularized by Moshe Lewin, is a legend. That Lenin recognized the effects is clear, as Lewin and many others have shown; but it is

by no means certain that Lenin understood that the cause lay in his own view of the Party. We have seen how, under Lenin's active direction, the seeds of further degeneration were sown: the banning of factions, the defeat of the Workers' Opposition, the decision to use "experts," and so on. Significantly, this "metaphysics" was shared by the majority of Stalin's opponents, from Trotsky on, and helps explain their failures, and their reaction during the purges.

The extension of the metaphysics of the Party in Russia was the gradual fusing of Party and state. And why not? If the state is a "workers' state," and the Party is the "workers' Party," then their unification is "logical." This development was culminated under Stalin: whereas Lenin led Russia as a chief of state, Stalin's dictatorship was exercised from his position as General Secretary of the Party. The Marxian notion that the state will disappear and be replaced by a refurbished civil society is lost, and civil society finds itself ever more under the heel of the omnipresent state-Party.

I do not mean to argue that "theory" was the cause of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and of the failure of revolution in the West. The conditions in which the Bolsheviks were forced to operate, especially the reflux of world proletarian action after 1923, were hardly favorable. On the other hand, the ideological practice of making a virtue out of necessity, and the insistence on the infallibility of the Bolshevik Party and the Russian model, certainly did not further the possibilities. There is an important ambiguity in the relation between Lenin's theory and his practice; and with his death it was the theory that was made into doctrine. At the outset, the Russian Revolution and the risings that succeeded it throughout Europe were mass movements of an independent proletariat. With the decline of proletarian energy, the party was left high and dry, and the doctrine that, under Lenin's leadership, had been open to the mood of the masses, ossified and became an ideology, a form of false-consciousness.

There were alternatives to Bolshevism. The theoretical work of Lukács, Korsch, Gramsci, Bloch, and the Council Communists is an attempt to translate actual struggles into an open-ended theory whose key is the "Communist imperative," that the socialist revolution depends on the free development of class consciousness. Their works were intended to have immediate political consequences in a period of revolutionary ferment. In addition to

discussions of the dialectic and the problems of reification and alienation, Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, for example, contains essays on the revolutionary Party, the practice of Rosa Luxemburg and of the Russian Revolution, and the question of legal and illegal action. While the discussion of the Party is a subtle (and, in my opinion, unsuccessful) defense of the Leninist Party, the rest of the book falls very much in the tradition of left-wing communism with its stress on class consciousness and the establishment of a new, proletarian legality and social order.

The practical and theoretical work of Korsch and Gramsci during this period concentrated on the development of the workers' councils as the medium of a new proletarian upsurge. Korsch's 1922 essay, *Arbeitsrecht für Betriebsräte*, is an attempt to show how the temporary conquests of the first stages of the revolution, especially the limited participation that the Weimar Constitution granted, could be used as a self-transcending stage in the move toward a true industrial democracy. In Korsch's eyes, the workers' councils had to develop a "new principle of order" and a proletarian democracy, on the basis of which the rest of society could be reformed. In this, Korsch's position is close to that of Gramsci's *Ordine Nuovo* group. Interestingly, both Korsch and Gramsci did join the Communist Party during this period, showing that in a time when the masses are on the move, the Party does open itself to new ideas. Korsch, however, left the Party after the fall in the level of activity had led to its Bolshevization. It is difficult to know how Gramsci would have reacted had he not been condemned to isolation in Mussolini's prisons. There are indications that he would have fought the Bolshevization, or broken with the Party, and that Togliatti's later use of Gramsci as an Italian Lenin-figure is an ideological ploy.

With the decline of the movement, the theories developed during its active days lost their actuality. The Council Communists lost their audience and became little more than a sect. Their leader, Anton Pannekoek, withdrew from the practical movement, devoting himself to astronomy and to writing theoretical articles. The hopes for a new legality based on the hegemony of the working class exercised through its councils faded, and at the Fifth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the International (ECCI), in 1925, it was solemnly affirmed that "Leninism is Marxism in the era of monopoly capitalism (imperialism), imperialist wars and proletarian revolutions." The cult of Lenin began in earnest with Stalin's book, *Problems of Leninism*.

The mood of the new orthodoxy can be seen from its attitude toward Hegel. In 1923, Hegel's *Logic* was republished in Germany for the first time in eighty years. Immediately, the *Rote Fahne*, newspaper of the KPD, warned its militants against the danger to those "little familiar with the history of philosophy, or not up to date with the essential results of natural science and mathematics since Hegel."³⁷ Eight days later, the same paper formally condemned Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*. During the same period, Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy* was criticized for deviating from the Party line. The philosophical view of the new orthodoxy was based on Lenin's 1908 polemic, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, and Bukharin's 1922 simplification, *Historical Materialism*—despite the fact that Lenin had spent the war years studying Hegel's dialectic and had in 1922 recommended the formation of a materialist society for the study of Hegelian dialectics.

In his 1930 reply to his critics, Korsch notes the peculiarity that the attacks on his book by the orthodoxy of the Third International, and those of Kautsky and the SPD develop precisely the same points, save that the former accuse him of "revisionism" while the latter chose the epithet "Communist" to describe his heresy. This, he argues, is because in both cases the "Marxism" on which the critique is based is in fact an ideology—a theory divorced from the actual movement of history, which conceals its own contradictions. Lenin's philosophy, admittedly written in the context of intraparty theoretical struggle, is an abstract epistemological defense of crude eighteenth-century materialism. "Lenin's 'philosophical' point of view appears . . . as a quite particular form of the position . . . whose essential error the young Marx characterized in a penetrating manner when he declaimed against '*the practical political party which thinks that it can (practically) eliminate philosophy without (theoretically) realizing it.*'"³⁸ Taking consciousness as merely a mirror of the material world is a return to a pre-Hegelian dualism of mind and matter, theory and practice. It is abstract, for it does not understand that consciousness itself is an existent historical and social formation. Such a materialism neglects the *active mediation by consciousness*. Its view of history can only adapt itself passively to the "necessities" of the given situation, accepting the priority of matter over human freedom. The Leninist "materialism" is missing the dialectical element that makes room for, and gives the leading role to, the active historical subject. In other words, the philosophical foundations

of the Leninist system contain the ingredients that would enable it to ruthlessly mold the material substance of society to its will at the same time that it neglects the subjective conditions essential to the realization of socialism. On this central point, Korsch rejoins Pannekoek, as well as Gramsci and Lukács: the naïve materialism of the new orthodoxy neglects the active subject, and in so doing plays a negative role in the struggle.

The efforts of Korsch, Gramsci, Lukács, and Bloch to revitalize the dialectical element of Marxism fell on deaf ears during the mid-twenties. With the ebbing of action, the stress on the active subject appeared abstract and idealist. By 1924 capitalism seemed to have entered a new period of stabilization and growth, save in Italy, and the International set about cultivating its garden. We cannot here treat the twists and turns of the politics of the International under the influence of the struggle for power in Russia. What is important is that during this period, the original, creative Marxism that had evolved in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution had no audience.³⁹ The need of the moment was what Paul Breines calls the “organization and administration of the workers’ passivity.” It was only at the end of the 1960s, when a new movement made them again relevant, that the works of these figures of the “unknown dimension” began to be republished and eagerly read in Europe.

V

The history of Europe between 1924 and 1933 is marked by the ascent of fascism and the inability of both bourgeois democrats and Communists to prevent it. Despite the surface idealism of Wilson’s Fourteen Points, the Treaty of Versailles was the result of imperialist power politics. Territorial settlements were not based on the right of self-determination, and no one was particularly happy with the results. In Germany, the Social Democratic leader Scheidemann resigned rather than sign the “Diktat,” which cost Germany Alsace-Lorraine, its Polish territories and its colonies, in addition to a still to be determined amount of reparations. Especially humiliating was Article 231, which was, in effect, a “war guilt clause,” whose effects on Weimar democracy were to prove fatal. Another Social Democrat, Gustav Bauer, finally signed the treaty; and the fact that a “Socialist” regime that had come to

power on the basis of a "revolution," and which was attempting to establish a democracy in Germany, signed this treaty provided anti-democratic forces with excellent propaganda materials.

Not only the "Diktat of Versailles," but also severe economic conditions, were the lot of the Weimar Republic in its early years. Inflation and working-class agitation created a crisis situation by 1923. By the time the Dawes Plan had finally settled the reparations problem, cooled the inflation, and arranged the evacuation of the Ruhr, the small savings of the German middle class had been eaten up by the inflation and the concentration of capital had been accelerated. A huge inflow of foreign loans during the next years of relative prosperity furthered this monopolization. With the onset of the Great Depression, however, the vulnerability of German prosperity revealed itself. Believing that the flow of loans would continue indefinitely, German monopoly capital had overextended itself; in an economy that had been unable to produce at full capacity even during prosperity, the depression brought a disaster that only the Nazi remilitarization programs or socialist revolution could end.

In retrospect, Weimar democracy never seemed to have had a chance of success and was condemned to be rocked by succeeding crises. The psychological effects of the World War weighed heavily throughout Europe. The 1920s were a period of despair and frustration, seeing the ascent of reactionary governments not only in Italy and Germany, but in Spain, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, and Portugal. Man seemed to have lost his social roots and to have fallen under the domination of the machine. Life had lost its meaning, and the individual quest for values—seen in the philosophy of the time, *Lebensphilosophie*, the existentialism of Martin Buber's *I and Thou*, and Martin Heidegger's search for "Authentic Being"—was replaced by the collective passion inspired by the fascist antirationalism with its glorification of war and tradition, its nationalism and racism.

The rise of fascism to power need not be documented here. What must be stressed, however, is that the gradual but relentless descent of Weimar Germany into fascism cannot be attributed solely to the machinations of monopoly capital and imperialism (though, of course, without the connivance of these forces and the bourgeois governments, fascism would have been impossible). The orthodox Communist definition—"Fascism is the open, terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist, and most

imperialist elements of finance capital” (Dimitrov)—is not sufficient. Fascism is also a response to the failure of the Left to assert its hegemony, its right to rule. Franz Neumann’s perspicacious remark that the Nazis did not dominate (*herrschen*) Germany but rather led (*führen*) it through the mediation of the Leader gets to the heart of the matter.

Based on a gross economism, the politics of the Communists and the Social Democrats could not deal with the subjective, human dilemma lived during this period. Their Marxism had frozen into a schematic ideology, leaving them powerless, even blind, before the changing lived world. As always in a period of crisis, the reformist trade unionism and parliamentary tactics of the SPD could not cope with the depths of the problem. The KPD was able to fall back on the infamous infrastructure-superstructure theory, which sees changes in social relations in terms of the economic mode of production and its evolution. This “theory” enabled them to “explain” fascism as merely a superstructural alternation on a decaying base, which would soon collapse from under it, leaving the way clear for the organized vanguard to seize power. Thus, the Third International asserted that “in order to deceive the masses, the Social Democrats proclaim that the principal enemy of the working class is fascism”; and the KPD declaimed against “those who don’t see the Social Democratic forest because of the fascist trees.”

One attempt to develop a creative Marxism free from economism and ideology, and able to deal with the all-important subjective factor, was Wilhelm Reich’s sex-economic theory. The importance of Reich’s work lies in the fact that he starts from the *lived experience* and *daily life* of the proletariat. In Vienna, and later in Berlin, Reich practiced medicine in the working-class districts; his evenings were spent in discussion groups with young workers. From this experience grew his theoretical work and the Sex-Pol Movement, an attempt to *politicize the everyday concerns of young workers*. Reich’s ability to mediate practical information and the political discussion of the role of sexual repression in the reproduction of capitalist society can be seen in the pamphlets and articles he wrote for this movement, which soon became too radical in the eyes of the staid KPD leaders. Reich’s analysis of fascism, and then his critique of Russian social and sexual conditions, finally led to his expulsion from the Party.

Reich’s theoretical work contains elements of the three themes

that dominated the concerns of intellectuals confronted with a world steadily moving toward barbarism: the stress on the element of *consciousness* and its relation to unconscious motivations; concern that social liberation be *total liberation*, a transcendence of the world of material need into the utopia of concrete positive freedom; and the effort to develop a *critical social theory* that could deal with the immediacy of the present in the dialectical context of its becoming. These three themes imply one another; and they share in the attempt to rethink the insights of the Marxist method, the *dialectic*, and to apply it to the *critique of daily life*.

With the decline of the movement came a separation of theory from practice; the old theory became an ideology, hiding the structures of reality. The theoretical enrichment that occurred was the result of the work of a few intellectuals not formally connected with the official movement. What could the theoreticians do? If they joined the Communist Party, they were either reduced to silence or, if they continued to speak, expelled; Wilhelm Reich was only one of many who took this route.⁴⁰ They could join one of the many splinter groups that, then as now, offered a "party" through which one could air one's views. The most important splinter group was the Trotskyists, much of whose appeal was their claim to represent the "true" Bolshevism of 1917. The purity that the Trotskyists strove to maintain was especially tempting to intellectuals, whose traditional weakness is to seek the ideal in order to avoid the choices offered by an unpleasant reality. Yet, little of lasting value was produced by the Trotskyist movement, apart from the work of Trotsky himself, which was largely conjunctural; its isolation from the masses, and the continual polemics about the situation inside Russia, doomed the Trotskyist movement during this period to the role of a Cassandra.⁴¹

One problem was that the "political" was too narrowly defined. Traditionally political theory distinguishes between the sphere of civil society and that of the state; the latter is the political sphere, while the former is said to belong to the individual in his private-ness. One of Marx's fundamental discoveries was that these two spheres are in fact only artificially distinguished, and that political liberation by itself is not social or socialist liberation. The strength of the working-class movement has always been that it has its roots in civil society, and that each gain in the political arena creates new social needs, which are the prelude to new demands. With the decline of the movement, however, the connection between the

two spheres becomes tenuous, and the political takes on a life of its own, whose theory is the ideology of the political parties. The theoretical barrenness of orthodoxy can be attributed largely to its being cut off from the concerns of civil society, the source of the felt demands whose translation is politics.

The history of the Popular Front in France illustrates the problem. Like the rest of Europe, France had its Fascist bands whose appeal was strong in certain declining sectors. On February 6, 1934, the Fascists took to the streets. The shock that this generated led the political parties to launch the Popular Front. Based on antifascism, the Popular Front had no positive political unity: Pretending to be a "democracy of a new type," it was the least common denominator between Communists, Social Democrats, Liberals (the "Radical" Party) and independent intellectuals such as those of the anti-Fascist Amsterdam-Pleyel movement. The PCF tried to play down its role; Maurice Thorez, its leader, spoke of the Church as a "noble ideal," and expressed the desire to wash the Party of "this vulgar materialism with which certain people reproach it." When the Popular Front won the elections in 1936, the PCF did not enter the cabinet for fear of scaring the middle classes.

Two events marked the history of Léon Blum's Popular Front government. One week after the elections, May 11, 1936, a wave of strikes occurred. The working class intended to profit from its electoral victory. The strikes took everyone by surprise, not only because of their size but also their form: occupations of the factories. The movement was spontaneous; and the demands were not merely economic. May 1936 showed the same spirit of hope and joy that gave May 1968 its revolutionary utopian character. But the PCF and the other parties were concerned with legality, with order, and with parliamentary procedures. Maurice Thorez launched his famous phrase: "*Il faut savoir terminer une grève*" (One must know how to end a strike). The PCF gradually canalized the strikes; the Accords of Matignon were signed, granting large wage hikes and the forty-hour week, both of which were soon lost in the ensuing inflation. Less than a month later, Franco began his revolt against the Spanish Republican government. Again, the "political" narrowness of the Popular Front government showed itself, both in Spain (where the Spanish Popular Front was unable to keep up with the socialist élan of the masses) and in France (where the insistence on neutrality ultimately cost the

Republicans the war). With the defeat in Spain, the fate of the European working class was sealed. Politics had triumphed.

A theory becomes ideology when it ceases to be an expression of the reality of its time, concealing the changes that invalidate it. With the widening gulf between the sphere of the state and parliament and that of civil society, orthodox theories become increasingly ideological. The renewal of Marxist theory must take place on the soil of civil society, outside of the accepted political parties and their goals. The development of a critical social theory depends on the application of the dialectical analysis to the lived experience of daily life. In a certain sense, the Marxian project had to be begun anew. The parallel between the work of the Frankfurt School and the Young Hegelians is not accidental. Theory had to re-create itself and its basis in the *praxis* of everyday life, rediscovering the vital living element that enables it to transcend itself.

That the Marxist theory developed in this inactive period rejoins the essential themes of the earlier, heroic period confirms that the orthodoxy did not speak to the concerns of the masses. It also indicates that the theoretical tools and analytical focus of the Marxists of this period reached the heart of the matter. Given the social and political conditions, their task was to insist on the power of thought as the negation that breaks the overwhelming presence of positivity and despair, setting it into the flux of history and opening the space in which revolutionary action occurs. Their Marxism was not a theory *for* practice, a kind of red-print for the conquest of state power. For them, as for Gramsci, Bloch, and Marx himself, socialism was the concrete utopia toward which humanity had always yearned; its theory, by the same token, is not the abstract negation of bourgeois theory, but rather its completion and truth, for, as the young Marx wrote, philosophy can be eliminated only by being completed.

Another contribution of the theorists of this middle period is their insistence on the truth of Marxism. In the editorial statement of the first issue of *Sex-Pol* magazine, Reich writes that "socialist politics is basically nothing other than the practice of the scientific world view. . . . [whose motto is:] *All power to revolutionary science.*" Marxism is not a doctrine; as Lukács had insisted in *History and Class Consciousness*, Marxism is characterized by its use of the dialectical method. Applying that method to the lived sphere, the Marxists of this period attempted to understand

the evolution of capitalism not as a political but as a social phenomenon. Because of the quiescence of the working class, these thinkers were forced to devote themselves to the study, and to the re-creation, of a twentieth-century Marxism. The unsystematic character of their own work is a reflection of the times in which they worked. And the already-noted connection of their leading ideas with the heroic period, and especially the fact that with the rebirth of a radical movement of social protest in the sixties their works are being avidly read and discussed, shows that their contribution has indeed been important.

VI

On August 22, 1939, the Hitler-Stalin Pact was signed. Nine days later, Hitler invaded Poland, beginning World War II. Ten months later France surrendered, and in the fall, the Battle of Britain began. Faithful to Moscow, the Parties of the International had changed their line from support of "just" national wars to the defense of the Nazi-Soviet Pact as the best way to preserve peace. The changed line cost them the support of many of their best militants, who could not accept the metamorphosis of Hitler into a friend of peace. In France, the Party was banned for its opposition to the war effort, and its militants were arrested. Then, on June 22, 1941, Hitler attacked Russia. The line changed again, and Communists took a leading role in the movements of national resistance.

Russia's victory over Hitler at Stalingrad during the winter of 1942–1943, and the courageous action of Communists in the resistance movements, helped erase the disgrace of the Hitler-Stalin Pact. By the end of the war, orthodox communism was more powerful than it had ever been. This was the case not only in the future Socialist Bloc, but especially in France, Italy, and Greece. But politics, and the interests of Russia, took precedence over the new possibilities; at Teheran, Yalta, and Potsdam, the Allies divided the world: Russia was given its buffer zone, and the partisan armies were told to surrender their arms. The Greek Communists' refusal to play this game was drowned in blood. The Truman Doctrine in March, and the Marshall Plan in June 1947, began the Cold War and were answered by the Prague Coup in February and the Berlin Blockade in June of 1948.

The victory over Nazism reinforced Stalin's control, and his cult was in full bloom. It is misleading to blame Stalin and the personality cult for the failures, hesitations, and errors following the war. A few examples from France will give the flavor of this period. The philosopher J.-T. Desanti saw Stalin as a "scientist of a new type"; for the Nobel Prize winner Frédéric Joliot-Curie, Stalin's contributions to science made him a "great genius"; and during the Lysenko controversy, Francis Cohen observed that "for a Communist . . . Stalin is the highest scientific authority in the world."⁴² The former Surrealist poet Eluard wrote these unreal verses for Stalin's seventieth birthday:

Stalin's presence, for us, shall endure tomorrow,
 Stalin today allays our misfortune,
 Our confidence, the fruit of his devoted mind . . .
 Thanks to him, we continue to live without autumn,
 Stalin's horizon shall ever arise . . .⁴³

Another former Surrealist, presently a member of the Central Committee of the PCF, Louis Aragon, wrote seriously that "France owes its existence as a nation to Stalin."⁴⁴ During the war the issues seemed clearly defined: the temptation after the war was to re-create a different—though intellectually comfortable—brand of Manichaenism. In such a climate, praxis is reduced to pragmatics, its efficacy being measured by an extreme goal.

For the parties associated with the International, Stalinism meant strict obedience to the will of Moscow—the surrender of national independence. The first to refuse this subordination were Tito's Yugoslav Communists, who were excluded from the Cominform on July 4, 1948. Tito's policy of national independence, which meant accepting aid from the United States as well as from the East, made him anathema during the Cold War years. Yet his excommunication was not sufficient to break his rule in the only country of the Soviet bloc in which the Communist Party had come to power without the intervention of the Red Army. To assert his hold over the other parties of the International, Stalin instituted a new series of purges, beginning with Gomulka's "nationalists" in Poland (in 1948) and followed by the Rajk trial in Hungary (September 1949) and those of Kostov in Bulgaria (December 1949) and Slansky in Czechoslovakia (December 1952). In these trials, and many smaller ones, leading officials and

long-time Party members were accused of Titoism, connivance with the West, and anti-Russian words, deeds, or thoughts.

The reaction to this phase of Stalinism must be set in the context of the Korean War, which broke out on June 25, 1950, turning the Cold War hot. Previously, some leftists had become critical of the policies of the International and were actively attempting to form a "third force." Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty had founded the independent Left journal *Les Temps Modernes* immediately after the war. The group to which Sartre, David Rousset, Albert Camus, and others belonged had formed the *Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire*, whose politics and personnel are graphically described in Simone de Beauvoir's novel, *The Mandarins*. In 1949 a group of former Trotskyists led by Claude Lefort and Paul Cardan (also known as Pierre Chaulieu—both pseudonyms) founded the journal and militant organization *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, which began its critique of capitalist and Socialist society, as Cardan once said, by "pulling the right string": that of the bureaucratization of modern society. The Korean War presented the independent Left with a dilemma. To Sartre, it appeared that a choice was necessary; there was no middle ground, and he personally would opt for the East. This position—and Sartre's theoretical "ultra-Bolshevism"—led to a split in the editorial staff of *Les Temps Modernes*, and to a series of theoretically interesting polemics, the most important of which were between Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, and Sartre and Claude Lefort. Without the party, there seemed to be no way of reaching the masses; but within the Party truth was secondary to "practical" consideration. It was the same dead-end street once again.

On March 5, 1953, Stalin died. News of his death was followed by a series of minor outbreaks in the Socialist bloc, the most serious of which was the General Strike in East Germany. Russian tanks intervened to restore "order," reinstalling the Party and dissolving the spontaneously formed mass organizations. In the West, the effects of this change were overshadowed during the next years by the victory of Dienbienphu and the Treaty of Geneva in 1954, U.S. interventions in Iran and Guatemala, and the beginnings of the Algerian revolution on November 1. Attention turned away from Europe, and with the Bandung Congress in 1955 it appeared that a third force might develop. Then, in February 1956 came the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, with Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, the impact of which temporarily over-

shadowed the same congress's outright advocacy of peaceful coexistence. In Hungary, the Petöfi Club began its public discussions in March. In Poland, the Poznan revolts broke out at the end of June, and Gomulka, who only a few years before had been purged for "nationalism," was brought into power in "Polish October." The same October saw the outbreak of the Budapest workers' revolt, with the formation of a new government at the beginning of November. The decision of the revolutionary government to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact, and the need to limit this dangerous precedent, brought the intervention of Russian troops, who were met with mass strikes and violence throughout Hungary until mid-December when the revolt was finally crushed. But as in 1953, the significance of these events was blurred in the West, this time due to the Franco-British-Israeli invasion of Egypt.

By 1956 the hopes of the immediate postwar period had faded into the grey everydayness of parliamentary politics and ineffectual protests. Immediately after the war the working class had been ready to move. Even in West Germany, where the working class had been suppressed by twelve years of fascism, workers' councils were formed in the factories after the war, demanding the nationalization of private property and a thorough de-nazification. But political considerations intervened: the ex-Nazi managers were needed to run the economy; there was fear of Allied intervention; "Communists" were expelled from the trade unions as the Cold War began; and the unions feared to appeal to their base because they did not know if they could hold it in check once it had felt its power. Neocapitalism, furthered by the Marshall Plan and NATO, sat firmly in the saddle; as a trade union leader recently noted, "We are striving to recover by evolutionary methods what no doubt could have been reached the revolutionary way in 1945."⁴⁵

Capitalism seemed to have stabilized itself in the West, and to be in the process of creating a new, consumer society whose material bounties could buy off even the economist demands of the traditional political parties. The Common Market, the "economic miracles" of Italy and Germany, and the Gaullist regime in France all appeared to incarnate the new stabilization. Four political directions emerged from this conjuncture: (1) the polycentrist movement within the International, sparked by the Italian insistence on the specificity of European conditions, and the

Sino-Soviet quarrel, which began in earnest with the recall of the Russian technicians in April 1960; (2) the “scientific” tendency, which argued that the failure of the revolution was the result of an incorrect understanding of capitalist society due to the vague humanistic and Hegelian rhetoric that took the place of the scientific politics needed in the highly complex neocapitalist society; (3) the tendency to look to Third World revolutions for the key to change in the West, which was bolstered particularly by the success of the Cuban and Algerian revolutions; and (4) the attempt to qualitatively redefine revolution, based on the influence of images of the Third World revolutions and by the rediscovery of the “unknown dimension” of post-Leninist Marxism.

Polycentrism broke the hold of the old orthodoxy. The Sino-Soviet split, the reintegration of the Yugoslav Communists into the International, and the revolutionary ferment in the Third World created the backdrop against which Palmiro Togliatti's PCI began to stress its “Italian Road” to communism. The PCI, which had been the largest party in Italy after the war, found itself losing ground as the “economic miracle” brought former peasants from the impoverished and backward South to work in the great industrial centers of the North. Togliatti was forced to take de-Stalinization seriously, especially after the further revelations of the Twenty-second Congress; open discussions of Trotsky, the question of socialism in one country, and the specifics of the Italian road were held. The Amendolist wing of the PCI actually proposed its dissolution in favor of a new, broad coalition that would have a better chance of gaining electoral power and uniting the Left. A Communist-Christian dialogue was opened, and there was talk of the PCI joining an electoral coalition with the Left Social Democrats. These developments were not, of course, the product of an abstract decision of the PCI's leaders; the working class was on the move, and the Party had to prevent itself from being outflanked on its left. The result of the polycentrist tendency was an open dialogue concerning questions that had been long taboo. The theoretical discussions that emerged were based in concrete practical choices concerning the nature of the Party and its role, its relation to the unions, the question of workers' control, the nature of anticapitalist structural reforms, etc. When André Gorz became an editor of *Les Temps Modernes*, the discussion spread to France too.⁴⁶

The “scientific” tendency, whose main representatives are

Galvano Della Volpe and Lucio Colletti in Italy and Louis Althusser in France, is a reaction to the dilution of Marxism that came when the parliamentary road seemed to demand an "open" Marxism whose humanism was stressed at the expense of the rigor of *Capital*. It is significant that this tendency arose *within* the orthodox parties. During a period when the class struggle is quiescent, it is tempting to have recourse to "science," which, if only correctly understood, is thought capable of putting the class struggle back on the right path. It was this objectivist, scientific logic that had led Lenin in 1908 to write his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. When Althusser titles one of his essays "Marxism Is Not a Humanism," his intention is clearly political. He is convinced that a reexamination of the founding documents of the movement and an analysis of past and present victories will provide the theoretical methods that can be used to understand and transform the latent class struggle into an active one. Also, it is felt that Marxism as a science must be shown to be superior to the science of the bourgeoisie, for the struggle takes place on all fronts. If Marxism is a revolutionary theory, the way in which it differs from other theories must be made clear, and the method by which Marx was able to open what Althusser calls "a new continent" for scientific research must be applied in the present struggle.

In its intentions, the "scientific" tendency wants to break with the reformism of the orthodoxy, and its attempt to found its method not only on *Capital* but also in the events of the Russian and Chinese revolutions testifies to this direction. Its practice, however, has not conformed to the goals it has set itself. While it could be criticized on both theoretical and practical levels, the most relevant criticism here is the one history itself has provided: that there are other, more important lessons to be drawn from the theory and practice of revolutions, and that the quest for "science" in the abstract becomes a formalism that loses the qualitative contents that make revolution what it is.

The success of the Chinese, Cuban, Algerian, and Vietnamese revolutions, coupled with the continual ferment throughout the Third World, led many to turn their attention and hope to that area. It appeared that the major contradiction in modern capitalism was the imperialist one, and that the working class in the West had been coopted and become an "aristocracy of labor." The Chinese attack on Russian revisionism made it seem that the flame of revolution had passed to the underdeveloped world In-

tellectuals, who tend to suffer from guilt complexes and to identify with causes and symbols, were easily susceptible to these arguments. And for the capitalists, demonstrations in France or Italy against the U.S. war in Vietnam were an excellent way of turning attention away from problems at home. The hope that the revolution in Europe would follow the collapse of imperialism implied that there was little to be done for the time being on the home front, and this hope created a revolutionary rhetoric that was but a veil for false-consciousness.⁴⁷

There were, however, other lessons to be learned from the revolutions in the Third World. It was Sartre who saw them most clearly, particularly as set forth in his Preface to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, and in his book on Cuba. The heroic resistance of the Vietnamese people brought home these lessons graphically, and for more than ten heroic years has hammered them into our heads. *Revolution is not simply the seizure of political power and the socialization of the means of production; revolution is the collective act by which men and women reappropriate their humanity in a struggle which itself creates the revolutionary society.* The struggle of the Vietnamese has brought home to us our own alienations and our own needs. This is the same position expressed by the "unknown dimension" during the period after 1917.

The return of the subjective element of revolution is the single feature that most strongly marks the New Left movements that sprang up in the 1960s. It began in Europe under the influence of the Third World revolutions and was taken up by the student movements, spreading an attitude of subjective revolt typified by these words of Mario Savio during the 1964 Berkeley rebellion:

There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart that you can't take part; you can't even tacitly take part, and you've got to put your bodies on the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machines will be prevented from working at all.⁴⁸

The spirit of the American student revolt, the civil rights movement, and the fight against the war in Vietnam spread from the United States to Europe, fertilizing an already-present feeling. The spirit of revolt, the demand for human liberation, and the rejec-

tion of the old schemata implied a *qualitative* change in the notions of revolution and of socialism.

The theories that anticipated this qualitatively different movement were rediscovered in the course of its development—which is, of course, the reason for this book. The German SDS (*Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund*), leader of the German movement, was strongly influenced by the work of the Frankfurt School, though they rejected and criticized their mentors' inability to put their ideas into actual social practice. Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* was published in pirate editions, as were the works of the Council Communists. Korsch and Bloch were published and republished; Gramsci was translated, and Reich was made available in cheap pirate editions. Marcuse's works were translated, and he himself debated at great length and often with the students, as did Habermas.⁴⁹ The works of Walter Benjamin have been partially published, and the Left has bitterly contested Adorno's purported touching-up of the manuscripts that were in his possession. The works of Rosa Luxemburg were republished and occupied buildings were named after her. The new German Left is thus returning to the radical views of the KAPD, whose program stated that "in its present state, the psychology of the German proletariat all too clearly carries the traces of the century-long military enslavement and, too, the signs of an incomplete self-consciousness. . . . The subjective moments play a deciding role in the German revolution. The problem of the German revolution is the problem of the development of the self-consciousness of the German proletariat."⁵⁰

In France, Merleau-Ponty had already called attention to the tradition of what he called "Western Marxism" and had explored the possibilities of a qualitatively different Marxism in his *Adventures of the Dialectic*. In 1960 the Editions de Minuit published an unauthorized translation of *History and Class Consciousness*, making it available for the first time in more than thirty-five years; and in the same year, Sartre published his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, affirming that Marxism had to be re-founded as a method, but that it remained the only possible philosophy. *Socialisme ou Barbarie* continued its analysis of the quality of modern life and was one of the first European publications to recognize the importance of the Berkeley revolt; by 1965, its critique of Marxism had been pushed to its logical conclusion, and the review ceased publication, though its influence remained. Under the editorship of Kostas Axelos and Edgar Morin, the review *Arguments*

attempted to revivify the revolutionary project, publishing discussions of the thinkers of the “unknown dimension” and introducing the debate over the “new working class.” André Gorz’s attempts to make available the insights of the Italian labor movement, and his own analysis of the contradictions of the neocapitalist consumer society had an important influence on the politics of the French student union, the UNEF.

The central theme of the New Left movements is the *critique of daily life*. This critique is exercised both theoretically and practically. The work of Henri Lefèvre, particularly influenced by Hegel,⁵¹ is typical of the new theory, as is seen from the titles of a few of his recent works: *Critique of Daily Life; Introduction to Modernity; Language and Society; Position: Against the Technocrats; The Right to the City; Daily Life in the Modern World*. The practice of the Situationists and the Dutch Provo movement is an attempt to use the methods of direct action to make the lived-contradictions into unbearable burdens that must be lifted. Returning to the insights of the Surrealists, the Situationist movement has stressed the need to awaken the unconscious and, as the now-famous slogan from May 1968 put it: “Take your dreams for reality.” When they took control of the student government in Strasbourg, the Situationists’ first act was to close the school’s psychiatric service which they saw as an instrument of mental repression whose goal was to make students adapt to an inhumane life. The goal of action is to force others to participate in such a way as to reflect back at them the image and the knowledge of their impotence and unfreedom, not in any grand metaphysical sense, but in their day-to-day existence.

The content of French May was determined by these new concerns, as is well known. May proved that the central contradiction in advanced capitalism is qualitative and that revolt is not simply possible, but necessary. May was also a sign that the “unknown dimension” of Marxist thought is still alive, and not a museum piece to be studied in bourgeois universities.

VII

Theory alone makes no revolutions. However radical its form, theory is helpless if it is not mediated by a living movement. That is one lesson of the “unknown dimension” seen in its historical

context. Although theory is not a tool for making revolutions, it is nonetheless necessary. In his autobiography, Sartre writes:

For a long time I treated my pen as a sword. Now I realize how helpless we are. It does not matter: I am writing, I shall write books; they are needed: they have a use all the same. Culture saves nothing and nobody; nor does it justify. But it is a product of man: he projects himself through it and recognizes himself in it; this critical mirror shows him his image.⁵²

As a critical mirror, theory is a part of the social movement that fights for a new, human life. The movement must be critical; it must be self-critical. Discussing the function of the radical journal he was planning to edit with Arnold Ruge, Marx wrote:

We do not face the world in a doctrinaire fashion, declaring: "Here is the truth, kneel here!" . . . We do not tell the world, "Cease your struggles, they are stupid; we want to give you the watchword of the struggle." We merely show the world why it actually struggles; and consciousness is something the world *must* acquire even if it does not want to."

Notes

1. In Henriette Roland-Holst, *Rosa Luxemburg, Ihr Leben und Wirken* (Zurich: 1937), p. 221; cited in H-M Bock, Einleitung to A. Pannekoek, H. Gorter, *Organisation und Taktik der proletarischen Revolution* (Frankfurt: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1969), p. 14, n. 23.
2. *Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*, edited by Dick Howard (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 332.
3. Cited in Michel-Antoine Burnier, *Choice of Action* (New York: Vintage Books), p. 40.
4. Karl Korsch, *Marxisme et Philosophie*, translated by Claude Orsoni (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1964), p. 36, n. 12.
5. Rosa Luxemburg continually returns to this Preface, reinterpreting it and pointing to the fact, later proven, that this was not Engels' view at all. Cf., my *op. cit.*, p. 382.
6. Helga Gebing, *Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (Munich: Nymphenburger Verlagsshandlung, 1966), p. 107.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

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8. *Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*, *op. cit.*, pp. 253ff.
9. The supposed Darwinism of Marx himself, reflected in the oft-told anecdote that Marx wished to dedicate *Capital* to Darwin, does not square with the nature of the Marxian dialectic, which is not based on the analytic method of the positive natural sciences but on the synthetic *praxis* of social formations, as Sartre shows conclusively in the *Critique de la raison dialectique*. Moreover, this supposed Darwinism of Marx has recently been debunked in a short article by Schlomo Avineri, "From Hoax to Dogma, A Footnote on Marx and Darwin" (*Encounter*, 28, March, 1967, pp. 30-32). It seems that Marx, in order to attract readers to *Capital*, had himself suggested to Engels that the latter, in reviewing the book, point to a supposed parallel between it and the then very popular and influential work of Darwin. This was done, and indeed with success, as the popularity of "scientific" Marxism within the Second International shows. In the end, however, Marx's *realpolitik* rebounded, and Darwinized "Marxism" culminated in the idiocies typified by the Lysenko affair under Stalin.
10. Hans-Josef Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie* (Hannover: Verlag für Literatur und Zeitgeschehen, 1967), p. 61.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
12. Kautsky to Plekhanov, 22.v.1898, in *ibid.*, p. 99.
13. The point is not formally incorrect: Kant's ethics is vitiated by a dualism of what is and what ought to be, and when the two are united, and only then, could his ethics work. The problem with this position is precisely its formalism and the lack of mediation between the ethical Ought and the actual is. The importance of Marx's early work is his discovery of the actual mediation, the proletariat. On this, cf., my *The Development of the Marxian Dialectic* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972).
14. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
16. Grebing, *op. cit.*, p. 120.
17. Cited in Serge Bricianer, *Pannekoek et les conseils ouvriers* (Paris: EDI, 1969), p. 36, n. 3.
18. On this, cf., the essays by Andrew Arato on Lukács (Chapter 3), and David Gross on Bloch (Chapter 4), below.
19. On Rosa Luxemburg's dialectic, see especially Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1971), and also Lelio Basso, *Rosa Luxemburg's Dialektik der Revolution* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1969), as well as my Introduction and notes to *Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).
20. *Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*, *op. cit.*, p. 262.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 268.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 395–396.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 286.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 367.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 118ff.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 412.
27. Nevertheless, they did sign the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, against the strong opposition of Radek, Piatakov and Bukharin, among others, who saw this step as the abandonment of the goal of world revolution in favor of an alliance of expediency with the Russian peasantry who were tired of war and wanted bread and land.
28. Bernstein to Bebel, 20.x.1898, cited by Dieter Schneider, *Einleitung zu Karl Korsch, Arbeitsrecht für Betriebsräte* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1968), p. 16, n. 2.
29. Bock, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
30. The further evolution of the Austrian situation, ending with the Dollfus regime and the Anschluss, makes a strong case against Bauer's politics of caution, which were to be repeated elsewhere after the Second World War. The position of the Austrian Socialists is interesting, for at least until 1927 it seemed to provide an alternative to the Communist and Social Democratic models. Refusing to accept the "Twenty-One Conditions" of the Third, and the reformism of the Second International, they established the short-lived "Two and a half" International. They maintained an armed force in preparation for an eventual seizure of power, and under Otto Bauer worked out a theory of "defensive revolution." Yet, when the moment for that revolution finally came, in the 1927 Schattendorf Affair, the Party was unable to follow the lead of the masses. From 1927 to 1934, the history of Austria was marked by increasing clerical and fascist reaction. When the Socialists did finally rise in 1934, in the midst of the depression, it was too late.
31. The most important conditions were: (3) creation of an illegal, parallel organization in clandestinity; (4) agitation among the troops; (7) expulsion of reformists such as Turati, Kautsky, Hilferding, Longuet, MacDonald, Modigliani; (8) anti-imperialist line at all times; (12) imposition of "democratic centralism" and "military discipline"; (13) periodic purges in the organization required; (14) unconditional support of the Soviet Union; (15) confirmation of all Party programs by the Executive of the International; (16) decisions of the International and its Executive are obligatory; (21) those who refuse these conditions are to be expelled.
32. For the position of the Workers' Opposition, see the translation of Kollantai's pamphlet and the notes and introductory material published by the "Solidarity" group in England. It should be noted that the NEP meant a defeat for Trotsky as well as for the Workers' Opposition, who labeled it the "New Exploitation of the Proletariat." The whole Party agreed that, sooner or later, the peasantry would have to pay the price for socialist accumulation; the crux of the debate was when the note would come due. After the introduction of the NEP, the KAPD, which

- with several other groups had founded a Fourth International, began to criticize the Russian Revolution as "peasant capitalist."
33. Herman Gorter, *Réponse à Lénine* (Paris: Librairie Ouvrière, 1930), p. 89.
 34. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
 35. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
 36. Cited in Lucio Colletti, "The Question of Stalin," *New Left Review* (May–June, 1970), p. 67.
 37. Karl Korsch, "La dialectique matérialiste" (1924), reprinted in the French edition of *Marxisme et Philosophie*, *op. cit.*, p. 173.
 38. *Ibid.*, p. 48. (The stress is Korsch's.)
 39. This situation explains the choices of Lukács and Korsch after 1924. The former insisted that the duty of a Marxist is to remain faithful to the movement through thick and thin, and he chose to do what was necessary to remain in the Party. This led him to support the Stalinist Soviet Union as the incarnation of the present stage of the revolution and the bulwark of the fight against fascism—though he did later criticize Stalinism and take an important role in the 1956 revolution in Hungary. This path, what one critic called a "long and humiliating Canossa," saw his study of the Young Hegel suppressed for many years, saw him forced to write literary criticism in an Aesopian mode, saw him polemicizing crudely against, for example, French existentialism, and led him to refuse to republish *History and Class Consciousness* until recently. Korsch, on the other hand, found himself increasingly isolated, and towards the end of his life adopted an increasingly empiricist, scientific position, as seen for example in his *Karl Marx*. Korsch did not choose isolation for the sake of his own intellectual purity, however. He felt that the reflux in political activity meant that the role of theory had to change as well, and his scientism was still always based on his original left-wing communist position. The fact that Korsch could continue to write political articles in Council Communist journals while at the same time leaning towards an empiricist, non-dialectical position in his scientific works poses a significant problem, into which, however, we cannot delve here. One might ask the same question about the relation between Pannekoek's theory and practice. On the choices confronting Korsch and Lukács in the twenties, and their path towards resolving them, see the work of Paul Breines, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1971.
 40. It should be recalled that the first Stalinist purges—of Riazanov, Soukhanov, Syrtsov, and Lominadzé—took place in 1931. The first Five Year Plan in Russia had been an economic success, though it had cost the lives of millions of kulaks and the voluntary destruction of their crops and animals. In 1934, the Nineteenth Congress of the CPSU declared that Russia had achieved "socialism" and was rapidly moving toward "communism." But the rise of Hitler forced a change of emphasis in the second Five Year Plan. Piece-work had already been reintroduced, and wage differentials were generalized, even glorified, in the Stakhanovite move-

ment. Though the 1936 Soviet Constitution was liberal in word, a series of laws had been introduced the year before to tighten up the previously liberal regulations on divorce and abortion, and also preparing the purges. The results of the purges can be seen in some statistics: Of the 71 members of the Central Committee in 1934, 3 died naturally, 1 was assassinated, and in 1939 only 21 others remained. In 1934, the CPSU had 2,000,000 members and 1,200,000 candidate members; in 1937 there were only 1,500,000 in both categories.

41. For an interesting critique of Trotsky, cf., Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Humanism and Terror*, and his *The Adventures of the Dialectic*. Merleau-Ponty argues that the position of the later Trotsky is based on a non-dialectical absolute morality of the Kantian style which prohibits any compromise with, and even an understanding of, a reality which does not fit the preconceived categories of truth and falsity, good and evil, theory and practice, with which the philosopher typically works. On Merleau-Ponty's own position, see my article "Ambiguous Radicalism: Merleau-Ponty's Interrogation of Political Thought," in Garth Gillan, editor, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Critical Perspectives* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972).
42. In David Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), p. 220.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 219, for original French. English trans. by David Allison.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
45. Cited by Eberhard Schmidt, *Die verhinderte Neuordnung* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1970), p. 184.
46. Though the PCI remains the most open of the Communist parties and has, for example, tried to enter into a dialogue with the insurgent student movement and the radical workers who have animated what is called "creeping May," there are still limits to discussion in the Party, as can be seen from the exclusion of the *Manifesto* group. It is doubtful that the PCI can be reformed from within, and its strategy is more than ever determined by the hope for a peaceful conquest (or more probably sharing) of power. The situation in the PCF, especially after May 1968 is worse still.
47. This is a double-edged sword. The anti-imperialist demonstrators were in fact those who led the May Revolt in France and the student revolts throughout the world. While there is a danger that anti-imperialist action will become an end in itself, and that the Left in the advanced capitalist world will see itself as playing only a secondary role to the primary struggles against imperialism taking place in the Third World, it is also the case that the development of an anti-imperialist consciousness permits one to better see the contradictions in the mother country. Clearly, the struggle against the American aggression in Vietnam has been a watershed, opening new dimensions of anticapitalist struggle at home and leading large numbers of people to a clearer understanding of their own lives in the heart of the monster. The worldwide imperialist system is

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- too tightly interwoven; single issues cannot help but lead beyond themselves.
48. Cited in Hal Draper, *Berkeley: The New Student Revolt* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 98.
 49. Habermas' attitude toward the Left, and theirs toward him, has cooled in the past few years, especially since Habermas' attack on Rudi Dutschke as a "left-wing Fascist." Habermas still considers himself a leftist, however. For some leftist criticism of Habermas' politics, but not his theory, see *Die Linke antwortet Jürgen Habermas* (Frankfort: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1968). The direction in which Habermas is moving theoretically needs to be analyzed in detail, particularly his new-found infatuation with Anglo-American linguistic philosophy.
 50. Bock, *op. cit.*, p. 38, n. 140.
 51. In the 1930's Lefèvre and N. Guterman edited a volume of selections from Hegel's works, as well as Lenin's *Notebooks* on the dialectic. Lefèvre's work is influenced by his relations with the Surrealists in their attempt to blend Hegel and Marx into their own radical project; in turn, Lefèvre's influence on the Situationist movement, in some ways close to the Surrealists before them, has been important.
 52. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Words*, translated by Bernard Frechtman (New York: George Braziller, 1964), pp. 253-254, cited in Burnier, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

II

The Russian Success and the Decline of Proletarian Revolution in the West

3

Georg Lukács: The Search for a Revolutionary Subject*

Andrew Arato

Introduction

As early as 1910 Georg Lukács was a revolutionary, but without a revolution. Twenty years later he was an exile in the “country of the revolution” where he could not be a revolutionary. In between he engaged in a theoretical and practical search for the “subject” of world revolution, evolving by 1923 a theory of the historical dialectic of the “subject-object” that is not only the topic, but is to an extent the theoretical presupposition of this essay.¹

Lukács was born in Budapest in 1885, into a family of wealthy Jewish bankers. He was educated in Hungary, and he also studied with Georg Simmel at the University of Berlin (1909–1910) and with Max Weber and the Neo-Kantian Emil Lask at Heidelberg (1913–1914). His first works of literary criticism, published at the age of seventeen, reveal a hostility toward the state of Hungarian

* Georg Lukács died on June 4, 1971. This essay, written before his death, is respectfully dedicated to his memory.

life and culture that deepened with his encounter with the bourgeois culture of the West. The first World War heightened the urgency of his critique, and the Russian Revolution provided the possibility of a nonutopian, political alternative. Lukács joined the new Communist Party of Hungary (HCP) in December 1918, and he was the Commissar of Education and also a political commissar with a Red Army division during the unsuccessful Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919. During exile in Austria, he continued his political and theoretical work whose intellectual high point was *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (*History and Class Consciousness*) (1923); his political work on behalf of the Landler faction of the HCP (against Bela Kun) culminated in the "Blum Thesis" of 1928. Both efforts were condemned by the Communist International, for apparently different reasons, and Lukács eventually exercised self-criticism in both instances. His explicit renunciation of *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* came only during his exile in the Soviet Union where he worked on literary studies and aesthetics, but wrote nothing on politics. Although his important work on the young Hegel was composed during his Soviet stay, it was not published at the time. In 1945 he returned to Hungary and was used as an intellectual battering ram against Social Democratic and Western ideology, though he did defend freedom of art and culture from institutional and administrative interference.² After the HCP came to power and just before the infamous Rajk trial, Lukács was attacked by the leadership of the Party. He was forced out of public life, returning only during the period of "de-Stalinization" when he became Minister of Culture in Imre Nagy's coalition government during the rising of 1956. Lukács was the only one in the government who voted against the renunciation of the Warsaw Pact and this together with his international reputation saved him from serious reprisals, although he was again forced to withdraw temporarily from public life. In the 1960s his works were once again published and there grew around him, for the third time in his life, a circle of brilliant young Marxist intellectuals, who are still barred from university teaching. At eighty-five, Lukács worked on the completion of his *Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins* (*Toward the Ontology of Social Existence*). The present essay will be restricted to the basic problems of this development until 1923 in order to illuminate some of the central issues around which Lukács' work has turned for nearly seventy years.

I. *Kulturkritik* of a World That Must Be Changed

Georg Simmel had already pointed to the increasingly tragic split between “objective culture” (the cultivation of things) and “subjective culture” (the cultivation of men through the cultivation of things). In a sense, deducing Marx’s theory of alienation from *Das Kapital*, Simmel conceived of human history as the process of “objectification” (or externalization) of *subjective* skills and capabilities (themselves gained initially from the interaction with natural objects) in the form of created *objects* or *objective* methods. He recognized that humans can lose control and consciousness of the objects created by them and their forebears, creating a world of objects that has a movement of its own, independent of the subject. The fundamental form of this loss of control is the workers’ increasing separation from the product, the tools, and other workers. But where for Marx alienation was an *historical* problem, Simmel conceived of alienation, the division of labor and the domination of man by man as eternal and eternally increasing, as the tragic fate of man.³

Lukács’ critique of culture took off from that of Simmel, deepening it and drawing out its philosophical implications. For Simmel there were areas that escaped from the general social dehumanization, particularly art and philosophy—the realms of “inwardness.” Lukács’ analysis of contemporary culture showed him that even these domains had fallen victim to the specialization endemic to rising capitalism. Subject and object were split, and human subjectivity had been objectified. It was necessary, therefore, to discover the mediations through which alienation could be overcome.

Lukács was compelled to face this problem in terms of Kant’s Third Antinomy, i.e., the contradiction between inner freedom and outer necessity, between “voluntaristic subjectivism” and “deterministic objectivism.” In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (A 533ff, B 561ff), Kant attempts to reconcile two “proofs,” one showing that necessity rules in the world, the other that freedom exists. His solution preserves the contradiction by *allocating its poles to two different levels of reality*. Strict determinism applies on the level of the *phenomena* (hence in nature and natural science), while freedom exists at the level of the *noumenon*, the “thing-in-itself” (hence in moral life and ethics). Freedom is thus limited to

the *inner* moral world of the single *individual*, and the interaction of men with one another takes place in a natural medium governed by necessity.

The problem posed by Kant's Third Antinomy deeply influenced Lukács' work, though from the beginning he sought to overcome it. In his early analysis of art as a function of subjective culture he criticized Kantian ethics as alienating men from their fellows, but could "overcome" the problem Kant posed only by resorting to an individualistic, quasi-religious conceptual mythology that still preserved the antinomy.⁴ Though his early study, *History of the Development of Modern Drama*, brought him close to a Marxian position which related art to "objective culture" (social and economic development), he conceived historical materialism as being only a "sociology." He therefore could relate class conflict to culture only on an external and superficial level.

The subject-object problem posed by the Third Antinomy was demonstrably at the center of young Lukács' philosophical concerns. This problem was of fundamental importance in the one published chapter of a systematic philosophical treatise he undertook in 1912.⁵ In it he argues that only in aesthetics can the unity of subject and object be achieved, but this can occur only if the creator is abstracted from all nonartistic aspects of his subjectivity, and if his creation is similarly treated in abstraction. In ethics, however, this unification of subject and object is not possible. Taking the most extreme form of Kant's ethics, Lukács argues that in ethics objectivity does not exist at all, and although the subjectivity of all men is insisted on, even this insight cannot be externalized, i.e., objectified. Significantly, Lukács remarks here that when we attempt to force such an objectification we transcend ethics and reach toward utopia.

Whatever the point of view of formal ethics, by 1914 utopia was the order of the day for Lukács. In this context, the famous *Theory of the Novel*, written in 1914–1915, abandons the class analysis used in his history of the drama, in spite of an historical analysis of the world of alienation which already shows some of the conceptual strength of *History and Class Consciousness*. With the submission of European Social Democracy to the World War, Lukács saw his age no longer as merely that of the decline of the bourgeoisie, but as that of "complete degradation." As a result, the overcoming of the age is presented in terms of a utopian perspective of the transformation of the inner life of men.⁶ Even as late

as 1917 Lukács insisted on this utopian model, although by then he noticed another alternative posing itself on the horizon. Still, he temporarily decided against this alternative, because “the ideology of the proletariat, its understanding of solidarity, is today still so abstract that it is not able—aside from the military weapons of the class struggle—to provide a real ethic, one that involves all aspects of life.”⁷

II. From Ethical Idealism to the Dialectics of *Praxis*

The Russian Revolution, which Gramsci described as a “metaphysical event,” and Bloch called a “novum,” radically changed Lukács’ attitude towards Marxism and the proletariat. This change was not immediate or complete; it depends both on concrete historical conditions in Hungary and on Lukács’ own theoretical evolution. The political and theoretical essays written between 1917 and the publication of *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* are important in understanding the dialectical path that led Lukács to his theoretically seminal, if ultimately unsuccessful, resolution of the subject-object problem. As will be clear from this genetic reconstruction, the implications of the subject-object problematic are immediately related to the questions of proletarian class consciousness, spontaneity, the role of the Party, the inevitability of socialism, and all the other burning issues that then, as now, plagued the revolutionary movement.

Even before the Bolshevik Revolution the subordination of workers to the war policy of the Central Powers was becoming more difficult. The events in Russia accelerated this process, which in Hungary culminated in the general strike of January 1918, followed by the “revolution” of October 1918, establishing a coalition government. The Hungarian Communist Party was founded in November, and it came to power with the declaration of the Hungarian Soviet Republic on March 21, 1919.

During the war years Lukács had moved increasingly close to Ervin Szabó, the leader of the anarcho-syndicalist left wing of Hungarian Social Democracy. He was reading Sorel and Rosa Luxemburg, and he was re-reading Marx.⁸ In March 1918 Lukács publicly clashed with Szabó over problems of ethics and world-view.⁹ Lukács’ defense of the politically progressive nature of “ethical idealism” represents an important change in his concept

of *praxis*. Now he no longer equated *praxis* with Kantian ethics. The realm of practice, he could argue for the first time, does not exclude objectivity; indeed, it implies the changing of the “object,” or *of the subject that became an object for itself*. Practice divides into ethics and politics. The aim of ethics is the inner transformation of man, while that of politics is the transformation (or conservation) of institutions. For ethics only a transcendent “ought” is important, while politics must always consider the empirical nature of institutions. “Ethical idealism” as a philosophical position rests on a perpetual (Kantian-Fichtean) demand for the dignity of all men, on resistance to the instrumentalization of men. The politics of “ethical idealism” turns this demand against all institutions, and implies the need of *permanent revolution*. Szabó could correctly point out that Lukács hardly considered the objective development of institutions, and that ideals can be successfully turned against institutions only when they relate to the “objective possibilities” inherent in those institutions. This criticism was increasingly incorporated into Lukács’ later works.

November 1918 was a month of decision for Lukács. He did not immediately join the newly formed HCP and indeed had criticized the Bolsheviks in a short piece, “Bolshevism as a Moral Problem.”¹⁰ The structure of his argument flows from his philosophic past, but we should not be misled: he later justified his joining the CP, in “Tactics and Ethics,” by many of the same arguments.¹¹ “Bolshevism as a Moral Problem” maintains that the central Marxist notion of the proletariat attaining general human liberation by realizing its own class interests is based on the Hegelian notion of the “Cunning of Reason.” But without a supra-historical subject guaranteeing a favorable outcome, the construct splits into “soulless empirical reality” and “utopian ethical will”—and is thus a return to the Third Antinomy. Accordingly, Lukács saw Marxism as both a sociology of class struggle and conflict and a philosophy of history resting on the utopian postulate and ethical “ought” of a socialist world order. The victory of the proletariat is the objective conclusion of the sociology, but the democratic socialist world order for which this is a precondition can only be the result of *the moral will of the proletariat*. All of Lukács’ pre-1920 articles on Communist morality, searching for the *moral subject* of world transformation, include this dichotomy, though in a progressively more historical context.

Lukács decided against the Bolsheviks because he could not

convince himself that a democratic world order could be willed by nondemocratic means, or that the "sudden heroism" of Bolshevism involved greater self-sacrifice than patient democratic work. But in December 1918 he reversed himself. "Tactics and Ethics," probably written between January and March 1919, argues that the essential criterion for Socialist means is only that they build the consciousness of the new world order in the actors, and that the violent means of the revolutionary involve the greatest self-sacrifice (for a moral man).¹² The first argument relates to the tactics of the class; the second to the ethics of the individual. In both cases the element of choice is preserved, and its objective foundation is presented more historically than before. In this context it is useful to consider two other articles dealing with Communist morality, one written relatively late during the Hungarian Soviet Republic and one during the first year of exile. Between these two articles we find an important change in the concept of subjectivity.

In "The Role of Morality in Communist Production" Lukács, now a member of the government, addressed himself to the problems of production and work discipline.¹³ There are two possible solutions to the grave economic problems: the proletariat can either make *the free moral decision* to impose discipline on itself or create institutional means by which it *will compel itself* to obey a discipline. The former implies a significant advance from the "age of necessity" to the "age of freedom." The objective possibility for the proletariat becoming a free revolutionary subject was created by the historical process culminating in its victory. But freedom is not a result of objective laws. If freedom is chosen, it becomes part of historical development, a driving force toward the "age of freedom." Institutional compulsion on the other hand is a step backward, a renunciation of subjective freedom, which can entail the very dangerous consequence that the institutions so created must later be overthrown. Lukács was right. Still, the "free decision of workers," under the circumstances of a collapsing and isolated Soviet Republic, proved to be an untenable myth.

Written during his exile in Austria, the "Moral Mission of the Communist Party," came at a time when there was still resistance to the Bolshevization of the national sections of the Communist International.¹⁴ Here Lukács *seems to be* a blatant Bolshevikizer. Though we shall return to Lukács' view of the Party, what is here

important is the loss of much of his original hope. The demand for an internal transformation of men as a precondition for a truly Socialist world order is now said to be *petit bourgeois* conservatism, which relegates all hope of fulfillment to the distant future. He cites an article by Lenin praising the free initiative of workers in working on "Communist Saturdays." He asserts that "The Communist Saturdays . . . are *in no way institutional deeds of the Soviet Government, rather moral deeds of the Communist Party.*" Institutional compulsion would be dangerous, but the CP is not an institution.¹⁵ The CP is the "*organizational expression of the revolutionary will of the proletariat.*" Here the reader rightly suspects sophistry.

After this article Lukács wrote nothing on Communist morality but much on the Party. Apparently the two concepts were collapsed. But could the "implicitly" revolutionary moral will of the proletariat really be thus externalized in history? To understand even the meaning of this question we must retrace our steps, outlining both the development of Lukács' Marxism and his concept of the Party, beginning with the period of the Hungarian Soviet Republic.

Lukács' writings on Communist morality reveal a concern with the voluntaristic decisions of the subject (first of the individual, then of the class, and finally of the Party), within the context of "objective" historical possibilities. Throughout, a historicized form of the Kantian antinomy is preserved. However, the central meaning of *dialectic* involves precisely its resolution. This problem cannot be solved from the *subjective* side, that is, from the side of moral decisions alone. The problem also had to be confronted from the *objective* side, that of historical development. In the common formulation of historical materialism, the subjective side (i.e., consciousness) is made a passive function of the laws of objective economic development. The problem of the young Lukács was that in a sense he accepted this view, *but he also attempted to find a place in history for the creativity of conscious practice.* He repeatedly considered the objective process, attempting to find points or junctures where subjective *praxis*, freedom, could enter the process and become a historical force. Thus, at the very time when he was willing to assign the greatest potential freedom to the revolutionary subject, Lukács continued to interpret one aspect of Marxism as a deterministic science of historical development. His first interpretations of the dialectic, just before the Hungarian

Soviet Republic, contained many of the elements (necessary laws of the dialectic, fixed triads, etc.) that were fashionable among the Social Democrats. He did at this time introduce, in the first draft of "What Is Orthodox Marxism," the notion of *praxis* from Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach," i.e., the concept of a theory becoming practical to the degree that it changes its object.¹⁶ He also introduced a role for consciousness, even during the objective process.¹⁷ But in both cases he managed to leave the objective process intact. In the first case, he gave *praxis* a voluntaristic meaning, that is, he made the *decision* of the proletariat supersede any factual difficulties in the way of revolution. He did not realize at this time that revolutionary *praxis* (as all dialectic) must start with the immediacy of facts in order to be able to overcome this immediacy. In the second case, he limited the role of consciousness within the "age of necessity" to developing more advanced consciousness. Process and consciousness were totally separated and their unification was left to a future point of transition—the revolutionary moment. Furthermore, although he already used the Hegelian category of "totality" in those writings, at this stage he hardly developed under this category, even abstractly, the dialectical relation of consciousness and process as moments of a single historical whole. This last concept would have meant the rejection of a vulgarly reductionist notion of historical materialism (a direction in which he was beginning to move).

Although not changing the stark overall confrontation of objective necessity and subjective freedom (in the historical form of the "age of necessity" being followed by the "age of freedom"), two essays written during the Soviet Republic, "Old Culture and New Culture"¹⁸ and the first version of "The Change of the Function of Historical Materialism,"¹⁹ did begin to make the contradiction more historical and concrete. Both cases involved a reexamination of the dogmatic aspects of the method of historical materialism.

"Old Culture and New Culture" represents the summation, radicalization, and surpassing of all of Lukács' (and Simmel's) previous critiques of culture.²⁰ It analyzes the total reduction of "absolute culture" to objective (i.e., economic) culture under capitalism, which means the gradual destruction of bourgeois art. The subordination of all classes to the demands of production means the destruction of even the relative freedom enjoyed by the ruling class, which was necessary for the cultivation of works

of art as ends in themselves, as the values of an “inner life.” As works of art become a commodity, the only “aesthetic” value that remains is *exchange value*. No sphere of life escapes the world of capitalist alienation. But, the collapse of capitalism is objectively necessary, asserts Lukács, and implies the *objective possibility* of a new culture created by free acts of men in a classless society. “The transformation of society is only a framework, a possibility for the self-management and spontaneous creativity of free men,” and its “new culture” permits the resolution of the subject-object problem.

The same methodology is applied in the essay on “The Change of the Function of Historical Materialism.” In the age of capitalism, historical materialism is primarily a class weapon. However, in the “age of freedom” the function of historical materialism would be scientific research. This change of function is accomplished by self-critique, by the *application of historical materialism to itself*. The result: historical materialism turns out to be an ideology of the capitalist period, a function of the development of the socioeconomic substructure. Its truth is absolute within the era of its application, but it is relative to this era. Historical materialism uncovers the laws of a period of history. Its categories are historical, not eternal. In the age of capitalism, historical materialism validly reduces all other spheres of life to a function of the economy because the economy itself *actually* reduces other spheres to its market relations. For example, and this is identical to the thesis of “Old Culture and New Culture,” the distinction between *Absoluter Geist* (absolute culture: art, religion and philosophy) and *Objectiver Geist* (objective culture: the “reified” spheres of politics, law, technology, etc.) is eradicated.²¹ The application of historical materialism to itself reveals that it does not apply to precapitalist societies, where the economy is not completely free of ideological interference and where there is a leisure class producing absolute culture. Nor will historical materialism apply to the age of freedom, when even the economy would be dominated by the absolute culture produced by all men. The shift occurs during the dictatorship of the proletariat, which establishes the primacy of politics over economics.

By 1920 Lukács was in Austria in exile; the counterrevolution raged in Hungary, and Lukács found himself with one foot in the camp of the Bolsheviks. In this situation, Lukács undertook the complex task of reevaluating the problems of the revolutionary

movement. In the essay, “Class Consciousness,” he posed two questions: what is the role of consciousness in the objective process; and what difficulties does the objective development pose to the emergence of revolutionary consciousness? The concept of class consciousness, which is defined by the historical interests of the class rather than by what individual members of it may think at any given moment, was introduced to deal with the first question. The concept of reification was introduced to deal with the second. In neither case does Lukács work out the necessary mediations between empirical reality and concept. Proletarian class consciousness, as distinguished from consciousness of its immediate interests, represents the *unity of subject and object*, for the proletariat can recognize only itself as the truth, and hence the overcoming, of the historical period. Class consciousness is the *unity of theory and practice*, because this consciousness is itself a moment in the transformation of its object (i.e., of itself, and therefore, the world). This consciousness first became possible under capitalism, and only for the proletariat, for whom truth becomes a weapon whereby the proletariat changes itself from an object determined by the capitalist relations of production into a subject capable of asserting its own will.

The crucial problem is: *when, and how, does the proletariat become conscious of itself?* Lukács writes:

The blind power of the driving forces leads “automatically” towards its goal, its self-overcoming. . . . As soon as the moment [*Augenblick*] of the transition to the age of freedom is objectively given . . . the blind forces [of the capitalist development] blindly drive with apparently irresistible power toward destruction, and only the conscious will of the proletariat can save mankind from a catastrophe. . . . As the final economic crisis of capitalism begins, *the fate of the Revolution (and with it that of humanity) depends on the ideological maturity of the proletariat, on its class consciousness.*²²

But, if we assume with Lukács that this process is “automatic,” lawful, and blind, and that the proletariat is not (yet) conscious of it, then two questions arise. Why is the proletariat unconscious? And, if there are good reasons for this, under what conditions are these “good reasons” overcome? The theory of reification—an original combination of the insights of Marx’s discussion of the “fetishism of commodities,” of Weber’s idea of “rationality,” of

Simmel's description of alienation, and of dialectical concepts of mediation gained from Hegel and Marx—was introduced to supply an answer. This theory was developed rigorously only in 1922, in the famous reification essay in *History and Class Consciousness*.

In the 1920 essay "Class Consciousness," the concept of reification took a much simpler form. The proletariat is the negation of all the forms of capitalist life. At first, this negation is expressed only as a critique of *isolated* or *atomized* parts of the system (demand for higher wages, better work conditions—i.e., economism). This isolation of the parts from the whole is *precisely the effect of reification*. Class consciousness implies the understanding of the *totality* of these various moments, and the problem is to explain how consciousness of the totality can arise. In 1920 Lukács had no answer; he could only present "signs" of the approach of class consciousness—for example, the workers' councils are seen as the "politico-economic overcoming of capitalist reification" because they unite the political and economic levels, which in the past had been separated. Lukács also suggests that the self-criticism of proletarian consciousness is at least as important in the battle against reification as is the critique of the external world.²³ This theoretical insufficiency had an important effect on Lukács' practical political evolution. It must be stressed that his turning to the Party as the revolutionary subject was the result of his theoretical and practical inability to concretely work out the relationship of the *revolutionary subjectivity* of the proletariat in the *objective historical process*.

The suggestion that the workers' councils were a victory over reification had a different meaning in 1920, when the councils of Hungary and Germany had been defeated and those of Russia were gradually being transformed into more traditional governing agencies. Politics had again been transformed into an isolated sphere of the reified world; and Lukács' positing the "moral act" of the Communist Party against the "institutional acts" of the Soviet government testifies to his understanding of this change.²⁴ In the article on "The Moral Mission of the Communist Party,"²⁵ Lukács sides with W. Sorin, a Russian "Left Communist" who had demanded that the party cleanse the government of its bureaucratic, semi-bourgeois elements that endangered the proletarian internationalism of Russian politics. He saw the Party, in other words, as the guarantor against the return of reification.

From our historical vantage point, we know that making the

party a myth was hardly the way out of the difficulty. But Lukács' development cannot be judged simply from retrospect, especially since his article "Party and Class," written during the Hungarian Soviet Republic, is hardly mythologizing. Following the syndicalist Szabó, Lukács argues that the proletarian class and the party form are mutually contradictory because the Party integrates the class into the very society it is trying to destroy. But Lukács conceded no more than this to the syndicalists; the contradiction, he argues, is dialectical. In the nineteenth century the proletariat necessarily adopted the bourgeois party form because, while it was too weak to destroy the bourgeois state, it was too strong to abstain from politics. In the case of Hungary, the formation of the HCP, and its tactics—for example, the abandonment of bourgeois legality—implied that the proletariat was no longer too weak. The formation of the Soviet Republic was a sign that the Communists were correct. But this also meant, dialectically, that the HCP was no longer needed as a vanguard, for it had played out its historical role. In this respect, argued Lukács, the Hungarian revolution surpassed the Russian, and it introduced a new phase in world revolution.

Soon after the failure of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, Lukács admitted that he was wrong in postulating a revolutionary end (*Aufhebung*) of the Communist Party, and he began moving toward the Leninist type of Party and toward the creation of a party myth.²⁶ Lukács' first conception of the international structure of the Leninist party was certainly not very orthodox. He suggested that the Communist International should be organized around a federation of many equal central committees, and not around a single one. Indeed, he explicitly rejected the idea of a single Moscow central committee, because it would be irrelevant to the specifics of distant struggles. Certainly, he argues, the aim, the moral "ought" of the Third International must be total proletarian unity. However, this aim would suffer if the unity of many very differently developing movements were organizationally presupposed.²⁷ Lukács' seriousness about the autonomy of the Hungarian party and the uniqueness of the Hungarian situation led him two years later to accuse the Bela Kun leadership of disregarding the Hungarian situation for bureaucratic and careerist (in the Comintern) reasons.²⁸ At the same time, he tended to see the problems of Western Europe through the eyes of the Comintern.²⁹

By 1921 Lukács' theoretical understanding was clearly becom-

ing superior to his judgment of individual events. On the one hand, he worked out a dialectical position on the “spontaneity” of the masses, and he condemned both adventurist “putchism” and evolutionist “opportunism” as undialectical and un-Marxist. Following Rosa Luxemburg, Lukács insisted that revolution is a process in which each action of the party must proceed from the spontaneity of the masses, consciously raising spontaneity to revolutionary class consciousness. Following Marx’s first thesis on Feuerbach, he condemned both opportunism and putschism for reverting to contemplative mechanical materialism, for separating consciousness (subject) and movement (object), and for not realizing that *praxis* and class consciousness must arise from the activity of the masses. Theoretically, the role of the Party is limited to raising all aspects of the general class situation and particular class actions to the level of proletarian class consciousness.³⁰ This was hardly the Leninist position. On the other hand, just a few months later, Lukács excused the blatant adventurism of the “March action” in Germany.³¹ He even argued that the isolated “offensive actions” of a small vanguard can eventually overcome the “Menshevik” passivity of the working class.

Lukács’ first explicit treatment of party organization, “Organizational Questions of Revolutionary Initiative,” came when, following the lead of the International, he grew more critical of the “March action.”³² According to Lukács, what was wrong with the “March action” was not that it was Leninist, but that it was not Leninist enough! He argued that without a completely centralized and disciplined vanguard party the “offensive tactic” cannot work. Furthermore, the creation of such an organization would in itself lead to correct and successful offensive tactics. But the organizational requirements that Lukács outlines demand a very high degree of class consciousness and, thus still imply a stress on the subjective factor. In spite of all appearances and his own claims, Lukács’ position is not fully identical to the Leninist party type. His strong antibureaucratic stance forced him to travel a partially original road. He maintained that the creation of *his* party type can only result from a process, and one which varies somewhat in different countries. The main feature of the process is that organization and tactics are inseparable: although a party cannot wait to engage in political action until fully organized, it cannot disregard the work of the organization while acting politically. The process of organization is related to

the development of the masses: the process is completed only by the "constant interchange with the subjective and objective revolutionary development of the class." Ultimately, organization is defined voluntaristically, as "in its essence . . . the conscious and free act of the vanguard."³³

Lukács' position is extremely problematical. He convincingly argues that when organization is not conceived as a process or as a function of increasingly conscious political action, then the consciousness of party members cannot be raised to the level necessary for a dynamically centralized party. In that case centralization is achieved only in the bureaucratic manner, and all bureaucracy represents the penetration of *reification* into proletarian organization. The only way to avoid this is by developing class consciousness and centralization *together* as complementary parts of the single process. But the voluntaristic definition on the one hand, and the insistence on fully centralized controls at the outset of the process on the other, subvert the process itself. The conscious and free act of those who individually are not yet class conscious is a myth, and *by way of this myth voluntarism turns into bureaucratic voluntarism*. *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, most of which was written in 1922, made this dilemma even more fateful by further developing both the Leninist theory of the party and the criteria of class consciousness in a thoroughly analyzed world of reification.

III. The Dialectic of Subject-Object in a World of Reification

History and Class Consciousness is the culmination of the theoretical work of the young Lukács. It is more than a systematization of the previous works; in its conceptual strength and wealth of historical material, it represents a new stage in his development. His claim that only the chapters on reification and on organization were written in 1922 is slightly misleading. The developed theory of reification altered a great deal of what he had written previously and forced him to make revisions. In the following paragraphs, we shall concentrate only on the two new chapters, which are in themselves of book length.

When Lukács wrote "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" (the "reification chapter") he was *both* returning

to the theoretical center of the work of the young Marx, his theory of alienation, and unfolding the great wealth of implications in the central section of *Das Kapital* of the mature Marx, the “fetishism of commodities.” It would have been impossible to establish the fundamental ties between these two basic periods of Marx more dramatically, especially since Lukács did not have access to many of Marx’s early manuscripts. Yet, it is a mistake to identify Marx’s concept of “alienation” (*Entfremdung*) with Lukács’ “reification” (*Verdinglichung*).

The concept of reification has a dialectically moving center in *History and Class Consciousness*. This center indeed contains the “moment” of the critique of alienation, but whereas alienation itself is formally deduced by Lukács from the critique of political economy, reification is extended to a critique of sociology, and thus of the *totality* of capitalist society. After the experience of the Russian Revolution, and while maintaining the hope of a future World Revolution, Lukács sought to do even more. He wanted to develop the mediations, especially the concept of *praxis*, that would point to concrete possibilities of the overcoming of the reified world that he criticized. He reached deep into the history of classical German philosophy for the method of overcoming, the dialectic, and attempted to show that this dialectic could be concretized and made historical by the consciousness and *praxis* of the class that could change the world. He did not succeed in accomplishing this ambitious task (and the industrial working class has not overcome the world of reification), but to understand the difficulties, the “reification chapter” must be traced more closely, with special regard to the central subject-object problematic.

A commodity according to Marx is a “mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men’s labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor.”³⁴ This means that the market relation of commodity to commodity, which is essentially “a definite social relation between men” (i.e., a definite relation among workers who are parts of the total productive labor force of a society within a given social and economic system of production), takes on for the producers themselves “the fantastic form of a relation between things.” Lukács’ concept reification refers first of all to the *human social relations of producers appearing (emerging and seeming) as thing-relations of (produced) commodities*. According to Marx, the

system of such thing-relations on the market increasingly takes on (or appears in) the form of a *second nature*; bourgeois political economists are the “exact scientists” who uncover the laws of this nature as if they were eternal laws. The system itself and its “scientists” produce the illusion that the laws of the world of commodities are unchangeable.³⁵

Marx considered his “critique of political economy” a historical critique both of the system and of its “science.” Lukács, who had already utilized Simmel’s concept of alienation in his earlier work, immediately deduced the concept that historically and systematically lay at its foundations, the alienation of labor. The emergence of a “second nature” of commodities, argued Lukács, “confronts men with their activity, their work as something objective, something independent from them,” as something ruling them through laws that are as alien to them as the laws of physical nature.³⁶ Thus the separation between subject (worker) and his object (the product which obeys laws independent of the worker) and the fetishism of commodities, are mutually conditioning historical processes.

Lukács goes further in his analysis of the destruction of subjectivity. When *labor power* becomes a commodity, the subject’s physical capabilities are torn from him and become a “thing” moving within the laws of the objective process. When even the psychological aspects of the work process are carefully analyzed and manipulated (Taylorism), then even the subject’s “inner world” is torn from him and is integrated into the objective system of production. The worker, the subject, is left as a passive, deactivated spectator of the production process, and even of his own work in this process.³⁷

Lukács is not as explicit about the role of labor in the growth of reification as was Marx. He shows that the process of reducing most aspects of subjectivity coincides with the results of the increasing division of labor. The increased division of labor is seen implicitly as a historical precondition for a commodity system. But Lukács’ methodological insistence on starting with the immediate appearances, with the world of the commodity, automatically made his starting point different from that of Marx. In any case, he clearly presupposed increased division of labor and specialization in his discussion of the phenomena of reification, or rather, he systematically deduced them from the historically contingent notion of “commodity.” Once he accom-

plished this he had no difficulty in showing that the reduction (in reality and in theory) of the total work process to highly specialized partial processes, which are organized through exact calculation and prediction, is merely the other side of the world of reification.³⁸

At this juncture Lukács could also demonstrate one of his central theses, i.e., that the “commodity form” is the central form of the era of capitalism, to which all aspects of life are increasingly reduced. Max Weber’s notion of Western rationality, resting on the exact calculation and prediction of carefully limited partial systems, was extended by Lukács (following Weber) from the factory to all forms of administration and to all forms of modern science. The objective reification of all aspects of capitalist life had its subjective counterpart in the reification of consciousness. Any science or form of administration that accepts the “facts” of the world of reification as ultimate, and deliberately restricts its methodology to the examination and calculation of the *quantitative* aspects of partial areas of existence (areas that correspond to the fragmentation of the *objective* world into easily calculable and controllable parts), was a reified science or administration.³⁹

After describing the phenomena of reification, Lukács proceeded to “search for a method” to overcome reification. Following an implication by Marx in the “Theses on Feuerbach,” that the “active” side of the dialectic was supplied by “idealism,” he worked out an impressive history of Classical German philosophy, which he construed as an unsuccessful search for a subject that could produce and subsume the totality of being. He traced this grand failure through the levels of contemplation and “practice,” continually running into unresolvable regions of irrationality, (e.g., the Kantian “thing-in-itself” or the Fichtean “Absolute Ego”). He showed how a new concept of subjectivity gradually emerged in the work of Fichte and Hegel: *a subject that knows its object only because it creates it, a subject that is no longer the individual “I” but, rather the “we,” a subject that does not yet exist but would emerge at the end of a creative process.*⁴⁰ Finally, he showed that since Hegel’s conceptually successful view of the subject was not open to the concrete, historical content of subjectivity, it culminates in a quasi-theological conceptual mythology.⁴¹ Such a conceptual mythology was necessary for thinkers who, in spite of their profundity, could not penetrate beyond the limitations of the bourgeois world. Lukács insisted

that the method of the dialectic could be concretized, historicized, and utilized by the class that was “capable of discovering in itself, proceeding from the ground of its existence, the identical subject-object, the subject of activity, the ‘we’ of historical genesis: i.e., the proletariat.”⁴²

Lukács’ concept of the “identical subject-object” is a particularly difficult one. He argued that Fichte and Hegel evolved this concept as a point from which all of empirical reality can be derived, can be “produced.” But both philosophers knew that in empirical reality the knowing and acting subject is rigidly separate from its object. For Hegel the “identical subject-object” became another concept for the absolute subject of history, and he was criticized by Marx for this theological residue in his system. However, Lukács revived this conceptual scheme, because Marx’s original and penetrating critique of Hegel’s dialectic had been taken by vulgar-Marxism to imply the banishment of the dialectics of *praxis*, of the historical dialectic. Lukács carefully tried to avoid the dangers of Hegel’s methodology. He restricted the dialectic of subject and object to history, and he criticized Hegel (and Engels) for attempting to work out a dialectic of nature that was supposed to be essentially the same as the historical dialectic. Although he did maintain, with Hegel and Fichte, that in the immediate empirical reality there is a rigid separation of all subjectivity from objectivity, Lukács’ reason for it was that the immediate empirical reality of capitalism is the alienated world of reification. He hoped to part company with Hegel and Fichte precisely after this juncture, because he believed that he could work out the historical mediations that lead beyond this immediacy. Concretely, this was a continuation and critique of his own description of the phenomena of reification. From this description it followed that the proletariat in the world of reification is reduced primarily to the object of the economic process. Its remaining *subjectivity* is that of a merely passive and “contemplative” spectator. The task is to make or create the proletariat into a *class* that could become the subject, the “we” of history, the class whose conscious *praxis* could transform the world.⁴³ But Lukács still could not decide between Lenin and Luxemburg. He still argued that only the proletariat itself can accomplish its becoming a “class-conscious” class, and that Marx’s notion that “the educator himself must be educated”⁴⁴ must not be forgotten.

The problem, as we have tried to show throughout this essay, was that by 1922 Lukács knew the great theoretical and practical difficulties in developing class consciousness. And although his abstract description of the dialectic of mediation and immediacy, relying on the opening chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, is quite impressive, his actual attempts at mediation, his suggestions of how the rigid structure of the immediacy of reification might be loosened; how the total reduction of the worker to an object of production can prepare the ground for his consciousness of himself as a commodity (see the "master-slave dialectic in Hegel's *Phenomenology*); and how the reduction of the class to an object of history can prepare the ground for a class consciousness that becomes dialectically one with historical *praxis*—these actual suggestions of Lukács were extremely problematic, and they were made more so by historical development.

IV. Conclusion

From our perspective today the Left is no longer necessarily tied to dogmas relating to the potential revolutionary subjectivity of the "old working class" and to the objectivism of a deterministic economic theory. Yet the Left must still reach back to Lukács and a few others for the method of the dialectic, just as he drew upon Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and Marx. This does not mean that one should be uncritical of the theoretical source, whether Marx or Lukács. Such an attitude would be dangerous, especially in the context of one of the mediations that Lukács worked out—his concept of the Party.

Much of Lukács' reification chapter is an anticipatory critique of the Stalinist perversion of the Leninist party. Lukács harshly criticized all bureaucratic forms, which he saw as the basic organizational form of the reified world. He also produced a powerful critique of Engels' naturalization of the dialectic and of Lenin's copy theory of knowledge, the philosophical foundations of Stalinist ideology.

Yet Lukács was not only ultimately uncritical toward the Leninist party-type itself (which after all had the potential of developing into the Stalinist Party—as Rosa Luxemburg warned), he even made this party-type the basic mediation in the overcoming of reification.

Although we cannot explore this complicated argument in detail here, we must assert that Lukács' theory of the party is not the necessary consequence of the theory of reification, but rather of the antinomy of the deterministic objectivism and voluntaristic subjectivism that remained unresolved by the reification chapter, and which, in turn, gives the theory of reification a particular antinomic form. Certainly, the abstract discussion of the subject-object dialectic seems to resolve the contradiction. But this much even Hegel could do. When Lukács attempted to concretize the "*Aufhebung*," the historical overcoming, he was able to do this only "mechanically." On the one hand he continued to accept an automatic "objectivistic" theory of the collapse of capitalism, while on the other he postulated the free act of the proletariat near the end of the automatic process which would project humanity toward the "age of freedom." Thus the laws of reification were made totally deterministic and all-encompassing, and yet at their end a moment of real freedom suddenly was to become possible. Lukács did try to work out conceptual mediations relating to the growth of "freedom" or "class consciousness" within the world of reification, but unsuccessfully. The historical development of the labor movement gave him few clues. Moreover, the only clues that Lukács felt he could take seriously by 1922 were the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik Party. Thus, he located the first seed of freedom within the age of necessity in the strongly centralized and disciplined Communist Party. In the chapter on the problem of organization in *History and Class Consciousness*, he went one step further: he argued that the Communist Party is "an independent form (*Gestalt*) of proletarian class consciousness."⁴⁵ Against this view, however, must be opposed a line from the reification chapter: "if one tries to ascribe class consciousness an immediate form of existence, one unavoidably falls into mythology . . ."⁴⁶ That is, class consciousness can only be the result of a constructive process, and to presuppose the results of this process at its beginning is simple myth-making. Unfortunately, Lukács made reification so total that free choice could only be mythological.

Lukács' later self-critique, in which he asserted that like Hegel but unlike the young Marx he had identified reification with objectification is correct in this context. Reification is total only if it is identified with all forms of creating objects and objective methods. If it is not total, then there is a natural locus

even in the world of capitalism, where human freedom, the conscious freedom that could really overcome capitalism without repeating some of its worst aspects, can be nurtured. Already in *History and Class Consciousness* there are clues that not all forms of objectification are the same.⁴⁷ There are more clues in Lukács' later essay on Moses Hess. The discovery of the young Marx was to be the crucial corrective. Unfortunately, that discovery came at a time when the consequences of the party myth helped to bring the West European workers' movement to a tragic situation. The bureaucratic voluntaristic practice and the strongly objectivistic ideology of Stalinism made further development of Marxist theory and practice very difficult. Lukács chose to remain in the party even under Stalinism because he felt that it was the only way he could actively fight Fascism.

However, this activity could not take a political form. Lukács argues that even his literary criticism of the thirties (writings on the historical novel, Goethe, Schiller, Heine, Mann, etc.) represented a "partisan war" against Stalin's and Zhdanov's theories of art. We may surmise that this was a defense of both the historical principle of realism against a naturalistic one and of the intellectual heritage of Western culture (and therefore indirectly of a Marxist internationalism) against the Stalinists' increasing return to Russian nationalism. Nevertheless, at this time Lukács' formulation of the Marxist point of view from which art and literature were to be judged, was hardly distinguishable from the "dialectical materialism" of Stalinism. His first step away from this vulgar Marxism was his book on the young Hegel (written in 1938, published only in 1948), which consciously used the Marxian theory of objectification as a critique of Hegel and, indirectly, of *History and Class Consciousness*. This critique, however, did not become the general foundation of Lukács' thought until the 1960s; his attacks on existentialism and "irrationalism" after the war continued to presuppose a mechanical, deterministic theory. But in 1963, in his *Aesthetics*, Lukács finally began to develop a theory of objectification that analyzed art and science as forms of the humanization of men otherwise caught in the partially reified and fetishistic context of everyday life. His students in Budapest have done valuable work in elaborating the consequences of this theory in ethics, social and political philosophy, Marxist anthropology, etc. They are now moving toward a theory of the revolutionizing of everyday life. Lukács' *Ontology of Social Existence*, not yet published, will presumably further

develop the foundations of this theory.⁴⁸ Thus, Lukács' works in the 1960s represent an attempt to overcome many of the real difficulties of *History and Class Consciousness*. But these works no longer revolve around a theme that is crucial to a socialist movement in the West: the problem of the self-creation of a "subject" that can transform the reified world of neocapitalism. Whatever its difficulties, *History and Class Consciousness* remains for us a fundamental investigation of the problem of revolutionary subjectivity.

Notes

1. This is part of a doctoral dissertation on the young Lukács. In the context of the present volume, it will not attempt to work out the larger political and intellectual framework of the topic. A grateful acknowledgement of the help of Agnes Heller, Ferenc Fehér, György Márkus, Mihály Vajda, János Kis, György Bence and especially György Lukács of Budapest, and of Paul Breines of Cambridge, Mass., and Dick Howard is absolutely essential.
2. Cf., for example, his polemic against French existentialism, *Marxism and Existentialism* (1946), and his *The Destruction of Reason* (1954).
3. Cf., Georg Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes*, 5th (unchanged) edition, 1930, Berlin, pp. 503ff. and 511–514. The insistence on the central role of labor is limited to this early (1900) work. And even here the division of labor is conceived independently of property relations and relations of domination, Marxist critics of Simmel correctly point out his tendency to make the general cultural process central and the labor process only a special, derivative case. Cf. here, G. Lukács, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft* (1954).
4. Georg Lukács, "Von der Armut am Geiste," *Neue Blätter*, 1912 (first published in 1910 in Hungarian, *Széllem*, no. 5–6, pp. 67–92. For the Kierkegaard interpretation which is the basis of this critique of Kantian ethics, cf., Lukács, *Die Seele und die Formen* (Berlin: 1911), the chapter entitled "Das Zerschellen der Formen am Leben: Sören Kierkegaard und Regine Olsen," p. 78 and passim.
5. "Subjekt-Objekt Beziehungen in der Aesthetik," in *Logos*, 7 (1917): 1–39.
6. *Theorie des Romans*, second and unchanged edition (Berlin and Neuwied: Luchterhand Verlag 1963), pp. 157–158. On the problem of utopia in the young Lukács the best source is F. Fehér: "Balázs Béla és Lukács György . . .," *Irodalomtörténet*, no. 2, 3 (1969).
7. "Halálos Fiatalok" ("Death-like Youth"), 1917, in *Magyar Irodalom, Magyar Kultúra* (Volume III, of Lukács' Selected Works) (Budapest, 1970), p. 35. (My translation.)

8. Cf., *Mein Weg zu Marx*, and the 1967 Preface to the German re-edition of *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (Berlin, 1968), p. 12.
9. Cf., "A konzervatív és progressív idealizmus vitája," *Huszadik Század*, vol. 37, nos. 1, 2, and 3 (1918).
10. "A bolsevizmus mint erkölcsi probléma," *Szabadgondolat* (November 1918).
11. *Taktika és Ethika*, Budapest, 1919. Now in German in Lukács, *Werke*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Luchterhand Verlag).
12. This last argument relates to his earlier critiques of Kantian ethics, that is to the view expressed in "Von der Armut am Geiste," that to keep our hands clean *in our world* can be the greatest sin of all. Lukács attempted here to do away with the Kantian dichotomy of ends and means. On the level of tactics he was not completely unsuccessful in this regard, and on the level of ethics he only reproduced the ambiguous relationship between means and ends seen already in his earlier works.
13. "Az erkölcs szerepe a kommunista termelésben," *Szociális Termelés* I, 11, July 20, 1919. Also in *Werke II*, p. 90, and a long section is available in English in the essay by I. Mészáros, "Lukács' Concept of the Dialectic," in *Georg Lukács*, ed. by G. H. R. Parkinson, London, 1970, pp. 46–47. Mészáros is a quite useful source on the problem of morality in Lukács, but unfortunately he uses only a very few texts, and neglects the "objective" side of the young Lukács.
14. "Die moralische Sendung der kommunistischen Partei," in *Werke II*, pp. 105 passim.
15. Was he speaking of the empirical Russian party? In the article, he provides harsh criteria (constant battle against bureaucratization, etc.) for what the party must be. He certainly meant to improve as well as to approve: But who, given his premise, is to apply his criteria when the Party, as had happened in the case of the old Social Democratic Party, does become an institution? We should not be too naive about the actual political context. From the point of view of the German party he was clearly a Bolsheviker. In the context of the Hungarian party, where Bolshevization was not yet a problem, he was attacking, implicitly, the bureaucratizing faction of Bela Kun. And, finally, all issues were not yet decided in the Russian party itself.
16. "Was ist orthodoxer Marxismus," *Werke II*, pp. 61 passim.
17. "Das Problem geistiger Führung . . .", *Werke II*, p. 54.
18. For an English translation and an excellent introduction by Paul Breines, cf., *Telos*, 5, (Spring 1970).
19. "A történelni materializmus funkcióváltozása," *Internationale* (Budapest; July, 1919), p. 13.
20. There is a shift in terminology here. Simmel's "culture," the cosmical process of alienation, is now "civilization." Culture is high culture, and it is always, when it exists, the product of free men. In precapitalist society, he argues, some are free in this sense, while in capitalist society none tend to be, and in communist society all will be.

21. This suggests the later critique of reification, including a major problem of that critique: the identification of objectification and reification. The terminological confusion between objective culture and the objective process of the economy is an aspect of this basic confusion.
22. *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (1923 edition), p. 82.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 92–93.
24. Cf., “Die moralische Sendung der kommunistische Partei,” *Werke II*, pp. 109–110.
25. *Ibid.*
26. “Önkritika” (Self-Critique), *Proletár*, August 12, 1920.
27. “Organisationsfragen der Dritten Internationale,” *Kommunismus*, March 15, 1920, pp. 238ff. It is a pity that he did not keep this in mind when discussing single parties.
28. “Noch einmal Illusionspolitik,” *Werke II*, pp. 155ff.
29. Lukács himself now points out this dualism of his early development. See his 1968 Preface to *Werke II*, pp. 15–17. To his own comments it must be added that he missed in the other parties exactly what he fastened on to in the Hungarian situation, namely the dangers of the bureaucratic and adventurist interference of organs and personnel of the Comintern in affairs to which they were “purely external.”
30. “Opportunismus und Putschismus” (August, 1920), in *Werke II*, pp. 112ff. This essay is in a sense complementary to “Class Consciousness,” and the development of its themes occurs in two articles on Rosa Luxemburg, written before the “March Action.” One of these articles, “Rosa Luxemburg als Marxist” is reproduced in *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*.
31. “Spontaneität der Massen, Aktivität der Partei,” in *ibid.*, pp. 135ff.
32. “Organisatorische Fragen der revolutionären Initiative,” in *ibid.*, pp. 144ff. This essay is a preliminary study for the much more extensive essay in *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, titled “Methodisches zur Organisationsfrage.”
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 151–153.
34. *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 72.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
36. *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (1923 edition), pp. 97–98.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 99–101.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 107–108; 110–112; 115.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 135–136; 156–157.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 161ff.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

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45. *Ibid.*, p. 333.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
48. On Lukács' later development, cf., Ken Megill, *The New Democratic Theory*, Chapter 4, and the articles by Ken Megill, "Georg Lukács as an Ontologist," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 9, 1969, and Agnes Heller, "Lukács' Aesthetics," *New Hungarian Quarterly*, 7, 1966, among others.

Ernst Bloch: The Dialectics of Hope

David Gross

We are not here to eat but to cook;
dining comes later and last.

Ernst Bloch, *Spuren*

I. Bourgeois *Wunderkinder*

What makes one “radical?” It is a question that has as many answers as there are conditions *necessitating* extreme solutions. For the sixteenth-century peasant it was often some immediate social injustice (perceived symbolically as the sum of all injustice) that drove him to take up arms against the landlord. For the nineteenth-century artisan it was frequently the machine, and indirectly the whole process of mechanization, that moved him to strike out against the forces that threatened his livelihood. And for the industrial worker it was the experience of exploitation or actual physical want that turned him towards revolutionary alternatives of one sort or another.

All of these situations, and many more, have made “radicals” out of individuals, and even whole classes and segments of the population. Generally the stimulus for such “extreme behavior”

comes from the experience of some kind of concrete oppression (usually economic or material) for which the status quo can offer no satisfactory remedy. And being radical means not only rejecting the entire structure that oppresses, but also choosing alternatives designed to end the root causes of the oppression.

In Europe around the time of the First World War, however, there were many people (all of them intellectuals) who became "radicalized" for entirely different reasons: because they felt the unbearable weight *not* of physical but of *cultural oppression*. What disturbed these individuals was the insufferable state of bourgeois culture—its philistinism and decadence, its hypocrisy, and its lack of spiritual depth. And in connection with cultural decay, they also professed to see a withering of true individuality: the "person," they felt, was no longer an end in himself, but had become merely a "cipher"—an anonymous member of the mass or a slave of social production. Bourgeois civilization was thought to be at a dead-end. It had become worthless not only from an aesthetic and human point of view, but also because it had lost whatever sense of totality it once possessed. In its condition of *Zerrissenheit*—of "tornness" and inner strife—this civilization was judged incapable of even confronting, let alone solving, its own intellectual crises.

Given such a situation, renewal was believed impossible. The bankruptcy was too absolute, too unconditional; and more than that, it was only the reflection of a deeper decay within the fabric of society itself. Not renovation, then, but only transformation could solve the problem of cultural fragmentation. To transcend bourgeois forms was the imperative; but since these forms were legitimized by the whole capitalistic social and economic order, the inevitable conclusion was that society itself had to be radically reconstructed. Only in that way could a new, more vibrant kind of culture emerge—and, of course, also a "new man" whose existence was impossible within bourgeois society.

Those who arrived at this position were themselves offsprings of the bourgeoisie. By and large they were young intellectuals of middle-class origin who decided that their parents' world had exhausted itself and held no promise for the future. In response, they opted for Marxism and the proletarian revolution: Marxism because it supplied both a method of analysis and an explanation of how to transcend the given "moment" of bourgeois society; and proletarian revolution because they felt that the working

class was the only material force that could usher in a new reality, and, consequently, a new cultural and spiritual order.

Two young men who became “radicalized” for precisely these reasons were Ernst Bloch and Georg Lukács. Born in the same year, 1885, both grew up as precocious sons from well-to-do middle-class homes. Similarly, both received the best education available at the time, and both became brilliant students at Berlin and later at Heidelberg, where they met and became friends. At first, the two were drawn into the *Innerlichkeit* of Romanticism, but at the same time they shared a great respect (which they never lost) for the German classical period, the age of Goethe and Schiller in literature, and Kant and Hegel in philosophy. Both of these “spiritual homelands”—Romanticism and classical German idealism—were eras that had existed one hundred years in the past. The present epoch, in their opinion, was not robust, but dissipated and solipsistic; it was a time in which great art or heroic culture was impossible not only because of the “arbitrary and aimless freedom” of a specious bourgeois individualism, but also because middle-class culture depended on capitalistic market conditions, which meant that cultural objects tended to become “commodities.”¹ For both these reasons, Bloch and Lukács began to define themselves against contemporary bourgeois culture, and also against the type of economy that sustained itself by turning culture into an object of consumption. Likewise, they both set out to salvage the “self” from the narrowness and disintegration of the world around them. Thus, in Bloch’s first book there was the call to “unlock the world of the I,” and Lukács’ early writings contained a similar attempt to recapture the “whole man.”²

To accomplish these ends, both Bloch and Lukács came to advocate an “anticapitalistic cultural revolution” as the only way out of the spiritual and psychic poverty of late-bourgeois society. They began to talk about “total revolution” and the “total transformation of the world,” sometimes with excited and distinctly apocalyptic overtones. If, in their enthusiasm for the millennium, they hit upon the working class as the instrument of revolution, it seems they did so more out of disgust with bourgeois forms (and the longing to see them overturned) than out of a deep-felt identification with the proletariat.³ A striking statement by Lukács appears to bear this out. In *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft* (*The Destruction of Reason*) he writes:

for the liveliest and most aware intellectuals . . . who came under the influence of this decadent world-outlook [romantic despair] there is also necessarily an intention to overcome it. This intention makes the strife of the rising new class, the proletariat, for the best of these intellectuals extremely appealing; they perceive here signs of a possible regeneration of society, and in connection with this—and of course this comes into the foreground—a healing of themselves.⁴

Thus, the “liveliest and most aware intellectuals” embraced the working class as the New Historical Subject; but they did so largely for personal and cultural reasons—because the working class seemed to be the solution to, and effective dissolution of, bourgeois decadence. In a sense they “went over” to the proletariat, but they did not and could not *become* proletarians because they were unable to think or experience the world in class terms other than their own. The reason was, as Lukács himself argued, that the *Denkformen* (modes of structuring and conceptualizing thought) of the proletariat are qualitatively different from those of the bourgeoisie, and cannot be picked up at will by renegade middle-class intellectuals. This posed a unique problem for Bloch and Lukács. What seemed “healthy” about the proletariat was: (a) that it stood outside bourgeois values and negated them; (b) that it possessed a different kind of self-consciousness, which held the promises of new beginnings; and (c) that it had a firmer grasp on external reality than any other class and, therefore, had the ability to perceive the “totality”—the whole of reality as a process. But proletarian consciousness was also “class consciousness” and, as such, it appeared to be something *sui generis*. One could not float in and out of it at will because it was an integral quality of a class: a deep-rooted mode of shaping experience, a peculiar Gestalt through which “details are organized and interpreted.”⁵ In short, proletarian consciousness represented a particular way of looking at the world which could not be adopted or duplicated by other classes.

The dilemma of Bloch and Lukács, and others like them, was that they were caught between two worldviews: the bourgeois and the proletarian. They were no longer at home in the first, and were not yet capable of thinking in the second—except abstractly and theoretically (which is itself a bourgeois approach). Paradoxically, though, this “in-betweenness” turned out to be an essentially creative and fertile condition. It contained a pervad-

ing sense of *Geworfenheit*, of being thrown out of one class perspective while still not being at ease in the second. This condition, which both Bloch and Lukács shared, provided the stimulus for new insights that could not easily be attained by those securely in one camp or another. Lukács, for instance, was able to build a bridge between Marxism and the great humanistic tradition of the middle class, and even to create a "Marxist aesthetics" that had never been thoroughly worked out before. Bloch, on the other hand, fertilized Marxism with currents of thought previously believed to be outside the range of a working-class ideology: namely, with Christian eschatology, Jewish mysticism, and even a heavy dose of neo-Hegelianism. The result was a widening and deepening of the Marxian legacy, which carried it a long way from the positivism and economism it had suffered from around the turn of the century. At the same time, neither Bloch nor Lukács took anything away from the spirit or intent of Marx—revolution remained on the agenda, and the proletariat continued to be the historical agent to accomplish it. If anything, they broadened the meaning of revolution and pointed out that its impetus is not *only* economic alienation, but also the insufferable cultural and psychic alienation of capitalist society.

II. Life and Work

Ernst Bloch was born on July 8, 1885 in Ludwigshafen, Germany. In his early years he followed a wide range of interest, from cabalistic literature to the writings of Marx and Engels. At the University of Würzburg he began to specialize in music, philosophy, and physics, and even at this time acquired a reputation for encyclopaedic knowledge. Later he went to Berlin where he drew close to the sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel. When Simmel received an appointment at Heidelberg, Bloch followed him and eventually became a member (in fact, the *enfant terrible*) of the brilliant circle that met weekly at the home of Max Weber.⁸ After the outbreak of the First World War, Bloch, who was at this time a pacifist and socialist, left for Switzerland and stayed there until 1918. During this period he began writing his first major work, *Geist der Utopie* (*Spirit of Utopia*), which was published in 1918.

On the surface, the book appears to be suffused with dis-

enchantment. Why, Bloch seems to ask, has the magic gone out of everything? What has caused the modern "disorder of the spirit," and why is there such cultural vacuity everywhere? Without giving specific answers to these questions Bloch attempts to inject a note of hope. Things *seem* bad, he suggests, but there is no reason to slip into despair or resignation; much can still be salvaged from the past and carried into the future. Unlike many Marxists, Bloch does not consider the past to be an incubus that weighs heavily on the living. Present culture and existing institutions may be dead, but not the spirit of the past—not the enormous unrealized potential that still cries out to be made real. *Geist der Utopie* is a study of those suppressed qualities in bourgeois culture that must be set free. Existing forms are lifeless and without meaning because the content appears to have flown from them. But, in fact, the content *still exists as an ideal* even though it has not been actualized in reality. Bloch attempts to bring to the surface and make palpable the unemptied content of hypostatized forms; his goal is to help men discover what can be drawn out of the past and projected toward an undetermined future. Thus Bloch becomes a guide, and his book is an excursion through the various objectifications of philosophy, art, music, religion. From these he distills the tendencies of all that is not yet real but longs to become so. It is an explosive work because it views "what is" not as the culmination of the past but as a mutilated "bad image" of what should be. Behind the image are forces that portend a better age ahead, and they must be brought out even if it means revolutionary upheaval.

In 1920 Bloch returned to Germany and began the life of a free-lance writer in Munich and Berlin. Shortly afterward he wrote his second book, *Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution* (*Thomas Münzer as Theologian of Revolution*), which was an attempt to understand the common ground between Marx and Münzer, i.e., between a "religious" and a "social" radical. Münzer is portrayed as a man who comes to entertain revolutionary ideas not in spite of Christianity, but precisely because he takes his Christianity seriously. The road to revolution is not around the words of Christ, but *through* them—through the radical, apocalyptic message of Christ's messianism. To Münzer, the scriptures called for a fusion of belief and act, thought and practice; as he interpreted it, this meant a kind of "mystical democracy," the realization of heaven here on earth. This naturally

brought him into conflict with the established church, that “institution of compromises” that represented to Bloch the same sort of ossified structure he encountered in the social and cultural forms of his own time. The church exists to fight against the spirit; it mediates, smoothes over, modifies, and thus comes to terms with an unfinished world. Münzer rejected such compromises, and wanted to usher in an entirely new reality blessed by God. To the extent that he believed in the necessity of total change, and asserted that the kernel of the new society was not only already present in the old, but would be the instrument for overthrowing it, he was a precursor of Marx—and in a sense, he was the “theologian” of revolution, as Marx was its sociologist.

During the remainder of the 1920s Bloch deepened his political commitment to Marxism by moving closer to the German Communist party, although he never became a member. At the same time he perfected the essay as a form of expression and used it as a weapon against the “false consciousness” of his age.⁷ A collection of some of these essays entitled *Durch die Wüste* (*Through the Desert*) came out in 1923. In this short volume Bloch cut through much of the opacity of his time, but only with words; if one read between the lines the feeling communicated was that the proletariat, the “organizing *ratio* of Marxism,” had still to do the same thing in fact. The main section of the book (titled *destructio destructionis*) indicated that alienating structures had to be dismantled before new and more positive ones could be created.⁸ But 1923 was a bad year for the Left, and matters did not improve in the decade that followed. In 1933, with Hitler’s seizure of power, Bloch was forced to emigrate for the second time: first to Prague and Paris, and later to the United States. His hope for the working class seemed misplaced, and he was left with the necessity of explaining the failure of a proletarian revolution in Germany. In *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (*Legacy of This Age*) of 1935 Bloch provided a limited answer by presenting a theory of fascism that laid the major blame on the middle class, especially the *Kleinbürgertum*, or petite bourgeoisie. It is a trenchant book—a masterpiece of cultural criticism and social analysis—but in the end that was small consolation for Bloch. He had been exiled again, and the situation in Germany was worse than before.

Once in the United States Bloch settled in Philadelphia where he found himself isolated in a milieu he could neither understand

nor respect. Nevertheless, during his period in America 1938–1947) Bloch managed to write his finest work, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (*The Principle of Hope*). In this three-volume magnum opus Bloch attempted to study both the form and content of man's deepest aspirations. What have men hoped for in the past? What has been the nature of human longing or the “anticipatory consciousness” as it has developed throughout history? In answering these questions Bloch analyzed all the expressions of hope he could gather: epics, fairy tales, paintings, religious and secular myths, novels, poems, political utopias—in short, every piece of objectified yearning, every expression of incompleteness and projection he could find. From these Bloch tried to distill the evolving content of human hope in order to discover the substance of man's drive toward completeness. His conclusion was that the urge for a truly human society where man would at last feel at home on earth and reconciled with the world around him was basic to man's nature. *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* is a monumental work of cultural history from a Marxist point of view, and up to now it is the only one of its kind in existence. Along with Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* and Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, it deserves to be ranked as one of the most original and insightful books produced by a Marxist in this century.

In 1949 Bloch accepted a chair of philosophy at the University of Leipzig in East Germany, thus following the path of several left-wing writers who had already taken up residence in the Communist state (e.g., Bertolt Brecht, Arnold Zweig, Anna Seghers, Johannes Becher, etc.). Once there, however, Bloch's troubles began to multiply. At first he was viewed suspiciously by party intellectuals for his unorthodox opinions. But matters became more serious after the publication of a book of Hegel interpretations entitled *Subjekt-Objekt* (1951). In it Bloch openly challenged the Stalinist assessment of Hegel and attempted to reevaluate the whole Hegelian legacy, as well as Marx's place in it. Hegel emerges from these pages as a fundamentally radical rather than reactionary thinker; and the revolutionary thought of Marx is seen as closely tied to the insights of Hegelianism instead of separate from them, as the Stalinists argued.⁹ The book is important not only for the light it sheds on Bloch's view of Hegel, but also for what it reveals about his view of Marx. Like Korsch and Lukács, Bloch was a Marxist “Hegelianizer.” For him, the

most important aspects of Marxism are those that represent a transformation (in the direction of revolutionary *praxis*) of Hegelian concepts and methodology. But this opinion was considered "deviationist" in the DDR, and Bloch came under severe attack for his "bourgeois" attitudes. A heated controversy arose over the acceptability of Bloch's interpretation, and by 1956 it degenerated into a series of officially sanctioned polemics against the whole of Bloch's work.¹⁰ In the same year Bloch was relieved of his university position and forbidden to publish any of his recent writings (though earlier books could be reissued). Furthermore, he was removed as editor of the *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, which had served as a forum for many of his views, and was replaced by a new editorial committee of orthodox Stalinists.

During the next five years Bloch lived in relative seclusion. He was prevented from seeing his students and thus, he was cut off from the possibility of public influence. All of this, as Bloch said later, was part of the "tendency to silently bury me."¹¹ Nevertheless, he was honored now and then as a "fighter against fascism" and occasionally permitted to travel outside the DDR to scholarly conferences. In August 1961, he happened to be in West Germany when the Berlin Wall went up, and as a protest he asked for asylum in the Federal Republic. Since then he has been teaching at the University of Tübingen and publishing extensively.¹²

The fact that Bloch is now in the West does not mean that he feels any more congenial towards the so-called "free world" than he does toward the Socialist sphere. On the contrary, Bloch is as bitter about the triumph of artificial values and the blunting of utopian possibilities under capitalism as he is about the bureaucratic distortions of Marxism in Eastern Europe. His thought cannot be used to legitimize *any* existing political or economic system because by its very nature it is opposed to the facticity of *all* contemporary social forms, which are by definition incomplete.

III. Bloch's "Open System"

It is difficult to find a simple entry into Bloch's thought. On the one hand, its circumference seems enormous (including, as it does, more than fifty years of work), and on the other, the complexities

of the language used make his ideas appear at times almost unapproachable. However, Bloch's Marxism can be made more intelligible by focusing on the four key concepts that he returns to again and again in his writings: these are "man hoping," the "front," the "novum," and "concrete utopia." When these terms are understood, it will be possible to see whether Bloch enriches the Marxian vision or (as his detractors maintain) mystifies it and makes it harder to perceive.

Let us begin with *man hoping*. As Bloch views him, man is not *given* man—not man as the sum of his current attributes—but man-on-the-way to something beyond himself. He can be said to have an "essence," but the core of that essence is not static or "thick." In fact, it has not even been substantially defined as yet because it is an unfinished essence still on the way toward realizing itself. Man has not already been grasped and pinpointed; rather he is still open, still on the way toward becoming what he potentially is. And the form this openness takes when man becomes his own project is *hope*: hope that he can become what he is not yet.

This notion, that man is a being who is still en route toward a self that lies ahead of him, and that man's human nature is inseparable from the need to hope, informs all of Bloch's work down to the most minute detail. Hope is not something learned, an accretion tacked on later, but a basic and intrinsic human need rooted in human nature itself. It is to this image of man that Bloch is faithful throughout, and the one to which he owes many of his best insights.

The creative possibilities of a pivotal term like "man hoping" can be seen by comparing Bloch's concept of man with those of Feuerbach and Marx. For Feuerbach, the essence of man could be fathomed in *species man*—an abstract and universal notion of human nature, that is entirely ahistorical. But, as Bloch points out, the term "species man" leads to a "flat, fixed anthropology . . . one derived from a scarcely expanded *occurrence* of man."¹³ The result is an absolutizing of man as *Feuerbach knew him*—that is, the narrow and rigid *homo bourgeois* of the nineteenth century. Marx went beyond Feuerbach by defining man within his concrete social and historical situation. He thus came to see human nature as shaped by the ensemble of relationships which are produced and reproduced in daily life. There is no *a priori* human essence for Marx but only an essence that is formed

socially, by the way the world impinges upon man. But even here there is no notion that men are wholly determined by their social milieu, because in the end it is men themselves who make their own world and, thus, determine what they become. The essence of human nature is, therefore, social in origin, but it also changes along a continuum as social relations change or are changed by men. And consequently, the human "essence" is not conferred upon man, but is acquired in an active way—through immediate engagement with the world as an object-creating being, and by a transforming social *praxis*.

Though similar to Marx's in most ways, Bloch's concept of man adds a new dimension. For him, man is defined not only by the network of existing relationships, but also by his inherent future-directedness: by what he *wants to be* as well as by what he is. This adds a vertical direction to the horizontal one Marx had already established. From Marx's point of view, man is (as Lucio Magri has paraphrased it) a "being which intrinsically contains a critical consciousness of the given social totality, and the possibility of restructuring this totality."¹⁴ But how, and in what direction, will man restructure the totality? The answer will obviously depend on what man wants for himself. But exactly what does he want and hope for? Marx was not able to give a precise answer to this second question because he did not deal with human nature apart from its expression as concrete social practice. Bloch, however, goes deeper. Man, for him, is an "intention pointing ahead"—i.e., *generic man hoping*. With this concept he not only captures the notion of man making himself in an immediate sense (as Marx did), but also grasps man projecting himself forward to what he wants and longs to be beyond the "bad reality" of the present.

In short, man, as Bloch describes him, is in the process of becoming what he is. And "what he is" is determined by the possibilities within him that are waiting to be developed. Existing man is not final man but only partial man—man as he has arrived so far. His full human nature and his real humanity still lie ahead, and in the meantime he has to be treated (in Nietzsche's words) as only a "taut bow" or the "arrow of his own longing."

If man, then, is en route—or as Bloch says, "underway"—what is he underway toward? In approaching this question Bloch's tendency is to become lyrical. Man, he says, is moving toward his own horizon, toward a distant front lined with blue. Out of his own darkness he is groping toward the dawn where he may dis-

cover himself, for, as yet, "man is something which still must be found."¹⁵ By these poetic effusions, Bloch means something quite concrete. At present, man is merely existence, not an essence, since his true essential fullness is not to be found in immediacy but only along a "future edge" toward which he is striving. A time and space dimension are added to man's coming essence, which push it into the future and the far away. But for Bloch this is important because it makes it impossible to compromise with any given reality, even a Communist one, since not only is man incomplete in the here and now but so is the world with which he might compromise. The sole "being" possible for the moment is what Bloch calls *Being-before-itself*. Only at the distant horizon is absolute Being, man's complete essence, possible.

Man, then, is en route towards his essence. But how does he know what his essence is? According to Bloch, he discovers it in the *front* toward which he is projecting himself, and this category of the front is the second important concept which holds Bloch's system together.

Bloch uses the term "front" with different nuances. Sometimes it refers to the material equivalent of man's hope, that is, to the physical projection of matter in the world-process.¹⁶ When used in a human context, however, the word generally means one of two things.

On the one hand, a front is a *transcendental ideal*. Whatever man can conceive as perfect about himself is an unfulfilled aspect of his essence, even though at first sight it may appear imaginary and hypothetical. In the form of an ideal it stands outside of and above man, and as such it seems to be immaterial and utopian. Nevertheless, as an *ideal* it has the power to attract and actually to induce an incomplete humanity to complete itself. True, it seems that ideal man (conceived, as he is, in imagination and hope) is wholly other and apart from existing man. This is precisely the substance of alienation: that one's human essence is viewed as total otherness. Still, there is something in man—and it has to do with his nature as "man hoping"—that propels him toward the ideal. He wants to be everything he is not; he wants to realize things about himself that have so far only appeared in fantasy. To put it in religious terms, man does not simply want to be like God, he wants to *be* God—and this is entirely proper since for Bloch, as for Feuerbach and Marx, the image of God is nothing more than the projection of the human ideal. Man has transferred to a deity

all the best qualities of himself; he has reified and hypostasized them into a transcendental ideal. But by dissolving the barriers between the ideal and the real, and by actually introjecting himself into this "total otherness," he begins to recapture his estranged human essence, and that essence can now draw him into the empty spaces left by the notion of God. Put differently, what has existed up to our own time is the concept of a hidden God—a *deus obsconditus*, who has actually been only the objectification of real human qualities. But by abolishing the idea of God, and all such reifications of human nature, one does away with the fetishes man has worshipped up to now, but one does not do away with the void or the vacuum left by these reifications. Into the empty spaces of the "front" it is up to man to assert himself—to make his own Being the object of his longing. In place of the hidden God, then, the *deus obsconditus*, man must introject the still hidden countenance of himself—the *homo obsconditus*, or "hidden man." In this way, man places his humanity ahead of himself and then strives to achieve it.

This is the first meaning Bloch gives to the concept of front. It signifies the case where man's essence appears as a distant ideal, but an ideal that nonetheless draws and attracts man toward it, that is to say, that pulls man toward the discovery of his own potential human nature.

The second meaning Bloch gives to front is an internal, or interior, one. Here, the term refers to something beyond but inside of man, for if it is within man's ability to introject himself into the transcendental ideal, it is also possible to *incorporate the ideal into himself*. Then, the front is not "out there," but deep within; and the "future edge" becomes an inward, immanent horizon, not something that must be glimpsed beyond and outside of man.

The notion that man's essence can be "immanentized"—that the "front" is somehow within man—adds a unique aspect to Bloch's thought because it makes the attainment of the human ideal a process that takes place internally, through a continual self-realization, or externalization, of the human content that now lies inside of man. In place of an objectified human essence, there is now a subjective one, and in place of an external "Otherness" (which has to be approximately or actually "leapt" into) there now develops an "internal Otherness" which can be unfolded immanently from within.

Now, the subjectivization of the "totally other" or the tran-

scendental ideal is another way of describing the third key concept in Bloch's thought: the concept of the *novum*. The novum simply means the "new" within the framework of the old, or the absolutely original and fresh ideal as it exists within a compromised and commonplace reality. But this term, too, has a double connotation depending on whether it is used in a personal or historical context. Personally, the novum can refer to the sudden recognition of what one's authentic being is (e.g., a conversion experience). In this sense, the novum is the inner awareness of what man could be but has not yet become; it is the conscious grasp of all that lies ahead for man, provided the content of the new is actually unfolded and concretized in the real world. In itself, the novum is nothing more than a beginning, but it contains within itself the substance of what Bloch calls "the utopian entelechy of the soul." Once the novum has taken root it cannot be content with static existence or settle for things-as-they-are. The reason is that one becomes entirely future-oriented—that is, concerned only with the span between the "darkness of the lived moment" (where the novum resides) and the coming realization of the human essence. The present is viewed as the beginning of the future, not the sum of the past; and "mere existence" is barely tolerated, let alone absolutized, because the explosive potential of the "new" drives man beyond what he is toward the anticipation and actualization of what he must become.

The other meaning of the novum is historical. In this context, the term refers to an epiphany (into the sequence of time) of something radically new, something which literally "breaks into" history and shatters its orderly progression. Such a rupture can come from two directions: from the future, in which case it represents the kernel of truth whose fullness still remains to be developed *nach vorwärts*, toward the future edge of time; or from the past, in which case it signifies the concretization of earlier ideals that had only been "thought of" but never actually realized in practice. In the first instance, there is a bursting in upon the present of what Bloch calls the "not-yet" (*Noch-nicht*); in the second, the rupture comes not from the future but from the unfinished past: from what Bloch terms the "not-yet-become" (*Noch-nicht-geworden*). The perception of the not-yet comes through imagination, wonder, and utopian fantasy, while the retrieval of the not-yet-become depends on historical memory and the will to actualize what has only been dreamed of before.¹⁷

The category *novum* is an extremely radical one not only because it makes accommodation to the status quo impossible, but because it causes a serious disjunction in the ordinary flow of things—a real chasm and a new beginning where nothing existed before. The *novum* disrupts. It severs the historical continuum that tends to perpetrate old ways, and introduces something entirely novel. This is, in substance, the meaning of a revolutionary break with the past. Just as the notion of God entering history in the form of Christ is entirely revolutionary and disjunctive (since what was timeless actually enters into and transforms time) so, too, such *nova* as the proletariat or the Russian Revolution are new beginnings which demolish the old order of society. With the injection of the *novum* into history, the “old aeon” (as Bloch puts it) is replaced by the “new aeon,” and the previous continuum is shattered beyond repair. This does not mean that the *novum* becomes an end-in-itself or is complete just for having come into existence. On the contrary, the appearance of the *novum* is only the start of the revolutionary process itself since the main task is to develop and concretize what at first appears as only the seed of possibility.¹⁸ The potential *within* the proletariat and the Russian Revolution, for example, have to be unfolded and actualized. In themselves, they are both only the beginnings of a promising future, not absolute ends as they are often mistaken to be.

There is a final concept in Bloch’s thought, which in many ways is the culmination of the three already mentioned. This is the concept of *concrete utopia*.

Concrete utopia refers to a future condition where man arrives as the essence that now eludes him. It designates a state of being in which man is no longer “mere appearance,” but rather something essential and alive because he has become cognizant of his own human nature. Theoretically, this appears to be the ideal toward which all history is aspiring (i.e., the creation of the “total man”), but for Bloch, the situation is much more complicated than that. It is not possible, in Bloch’s opinion, for man to realize his essence in a vacuum. He cannot achieve even a semblance of his human nature if he remains indifferent to the world around him, because the very substance of his *humanum* is based upon his interactions with nature and the society on which he lives. Consequently, in striving to realize his essence, *man has to bring the world with him*. He has to help nature and society perfect themselves—to

come to the fullness of their own potential, so that he can be “at home” in the world, and eventually live in a humanized nature and naturalized society. This has been the goal of all utopian dreams of the past: not only to achieve human self-actualization, but to transform the world itself and make it a fit place for the whole man. It is not sufficient that man aspire towards his essence on a personal, inward level. Instead, he must transfigure his world along with himself, for his ultimate goal is not merely the *humanum* (the fully human content) but, as Bloch says, the *regnum humanum*—the kingdom of man on earth. To stop with self-realization is to leave the present world intact. But the completeness of human nature is impossible in an inhuman or anti-human environment. Consequently, everything must be redeemed *along with man* so that a “true homeland” can be made here below—a homeland that obviates the need for transcendental illusions.

For Bloch, then, not only man is in a state of explosive possibility, but also the whole external world around him. This is not to say that the world is merely “in flux,” but rather that it is actually in process of becoming itself, of achieving its own structure and proper form. Not only nature and the socio-historical world are alive with tendencies and latencies that can be realized, but even matter itself is evolving. All aspects of existence, in fact, are suffused with anticipation of their own becoming and imminent realization. But they cannot become what they might be without the help of man. Man, the open subject, faces the world, his open object. He interacts with the world and helps it develop in the same way that it helps him emerge humanly. The goal of this exchange is a correspondence between *man hoping* and the *evolving world*—“between the subjective content of hope and the objective possibilities” of nature and society. In the future, these two tendencies can achieve a convergence where *man becoming* is congruent with the world-coming-into-being. When this happens, “dream” and the “tendency of matter” coincide and an identity is achieved; the long awaited unity between subject and object is realized, and this is the substance of concrete utopia, the state of “being at home in the world.” As Bloch put it more imaginatively: this is the condition whereby the world becomes the correlative of man’s fantasy.

In summary, Bloch’s open system is constructed around what he has called an “ontology of the not-yet-being.” The subject of his study is all that is coming into existence, all that is filled with

anticipation on the threshold of its own future. The core of this becoming is hope, expectation, projection; and yet it is not only man who "hopes" in this way, but also the world itself—a world that is in a state of continuous fermentation in its effort to acquire (with human aid) its still undiscovered form. "In both man and the world," says Bloch, "the essential thing is still outstanding, waiting, in fear of coming to naught, in hope of succeeding."¹⁹ Thus, the restlessness of man and the restlessness of matter are really grounded in the same ontic difference between existence and essence, the present and the future. Just as man is a "non-established creature" who constitutes his own task, so, too, the surrounding world is a "vast container full of future," which needs to be developed and unfolded through human interaction.²⁰ The final result may hopefully be the fusion of man and nature, which Bloch calls concrete utopia (or, alternately, the coming *eschaton*). At this point a "home of identity" is attained where man becomes "one in essence" with himself, his fellows, and with nature.²¹ If this seems unduly speculative and idealistic, one should remember that Marx himself arrived at virtually the same conclusion in his *Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts*. "Communism as completed naturalism," he wrote, ". . . is the *genuine* resolution of the antagonism between man and nature and between man and man; it is the true resolution of the conflict between existence and essence, objectification and self-affirmation. . . . Only here [in a fully communistic society] has the *natural* existence of man become his *human* existence and nature become human. Thus *society* is the completed, essential unity of man with nature, the true resurrection of nature, the fulfilled naturalism of man and humanism of nature."²²

IV. Bloch's Marxism

Bloch's thought is impressive, but is it Marxist? Opinions vary. A commentator like Jürgen Habermas tends to place Bloch on the periphery of Marxism, seeing him more as a modern-day exponent of Schelling.²³ Theologians like Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, on the other hand, are inclined to identify Bloch with the radical, and heretical, religious tradition of messianism and chiliastic hope.²⁴ And at the other end of the scale, the East German party intellectuals see Bloch as a renegade pseudo-Marxist:

or rather as an irredeemable Hegelian idealist in disguise. A number of them, in fact, published a series of essays in the 1950s around the theme “Ernst Bloch’s Revisionism”—and for them revisionism was and is a term of reproach roughly equivalent to what “fanaticism” was to the Enlightenment. In their writings, Bloch was charged with being “unscientific,” “irrational,” “mystical,” “idealistic,” “voluntaristic,” and of course (and inevitably) a “bourgeois reactionary.”²⁵

There is some truth in some of these labels. For example, Bloch himself would not deny that he is a voluntarist; for him history can go either way—toward concrete utopia or back to what he calls “Nothingness.” There is no absolute determinism; it is up to man to make his future or to lose it. But Bloch claims that this view is not un-Marxian—that Marx himself was a voluntarist who looked on the future as open and not inevitable. What’s more, Bloch does not shun the word “revisionism” because for him the continual renewal and updating of Marx are necessary and integral parts of the Marxian legacy itself. Just as Marx did not take Hegel intact—but only reclaimed the “rational core” while shucking off the metaphysical husk—so, too, *real* Marxists should hold on to the essence of Marx while letting go of accretions which become obstructive with the passage of time.²⁶

What Bloch feels he has preserved is the original impulse of Marx—what he characterizes as the “rebellious disposition” and revolutionary intention of the founder.²⁷ Specifically, Bloch reaffirms Marx’s view of the necessity of revolutionary transformation instead of piecemeal reform. Furthermore, he stresses the radical *teleology* at the heart of Marx’s thought (something that had been generally neglected in the decades after Marx’s death), and he argues for a return to the initial “spirit” of Marx, which he describes as a creative fusion of seriousness and enthusiasm.²⁸ Lastly, Bloch keeps, and in some ways deepens, Marx’s emphasis on totality and dialectical methodology (which, as Lukács has argued, is the very essence of the Marxian approach).

All of this Bloch preserves and remains faithful to in the original Marx. But, under the claim of “broadening and expanding” the content of Marxism,²⁹ he adds elaborations of his own, and it is here that Bloch has received the most severe criticism from his orthodox colleagues.

For example, Bloch augments “material need” as the central driving force of revolution with *spiritual need*—with what he calls

spiritual, rather than physical, *hunger*. By this he means that there is another way (besides material oppression) wherein one achieves revolutionary awareness and that is through the experience of inner impoverishment or "emptiness." The feeling of anguish, of incompleteness, of spiritual vacuity and loss of meaning all represent an internal form of alienation, which is discovered in the depths of the self-encounter. If this experience of "lack" or dissatisfaction is viewed not as a personal but as a social problem (i.e., intimately bound up with existing definitions and conceptions of what man is or must be) then it can become the source of genuine revolutionary consciousness. The experience of insufficiency, in other words, necessarily contradicts "everything in objective phenomena which . . . does not satisfy it."³⁰ Consequently, spiritual malaise, when grasped properly, is a real ground of radical discontent. In the same way, the realization of the individual (the overcoming of one's poverty of spirit and psychic fragmentation) is *au fond* a radical project because it can be effectively achieved only on the social level: through the abolition of false consciousness and the existing order that false consciousness legitimizes. In short, Bloch suggests that the "crisis of the subject" is also a neglected locus of revolutionary possibilities.³¹ Besides the "tired and the heavy laden" (the physically oppressed, the traditional proletariat) there are also the "insulted and the injured"—those who feel their oppression in the depths of the Self, in the experience of being inwardly imploded and spiritually burnt-out.³² For both types of alienated men, there is a common bond of estrangement and dehumanization; and for both the "elemental energy" of their discontent is precisely *hope*: the will to become everything they are not, the will to fill up the void within. Although there is some justification in Marx for such an interpretation, these notions nevertheless run counter to much of the thought that has usually gone under the *name* of Marxism. In this matter of an inward road to revolution, then, Bloch does seem "revisionist," especially in the eyes of those whose Marxism is rooted to the Second and Third Internationals.

Similarly, Bloch is innovative in substituting *man hoping* for Marx's social man of *praxis*, and by reinfusing the idea of "utopian fantasy" into a Marxism that had always been eager to distinguish itself from its "utopian" forebears. Perhaps, says Bloch, "there has been an all too great progress from utopia to science," resulting in a "gradual undernourishment of revolutionary fantasy."³³ This

Bloch is not willing to give up because it leads to a spiritual impoverishment that withers the movement from within. Bloch's answer is *more* imagination, *more* subjective intensity—even a new Marxian cosmology, which he says must exist if a truly Marxist understanding of man is to be possible. All of this takes Bloch into areas where more cautious Marxists have not tread before: into the "openness of matter," the "darkness of the lived moment," and into hypotheses about the nature of concrete utopia which even Marx preferred to leave unexamined.³⁴

This experimentalism has disturbed many and raised questions in the minds of still more. Nevertheless, it needs to be affirmed as a basically healthy approach to Marxism—even considering the wrong starts and false turns such an "openness" may invite. At times it seems that Bloch mystifies Marx, and that he even returns to a kind of reflective attitude that Marx claimed to have transcended in Hegel. But on the whole it must be said that Bloch undeniably reinvigorates Marx, and in fact adds a prophetic and poetic voice, which has long been missing in the flatness of Marxian economism. For many, Bloch is a heretic in the Marxist camp, but perhaps this only means that he, like the religious heretics, has simply gone back for a fresh look at the pre-dogmatic origins and impetus of the movement (before any kind of sclerosis had set in). Bloch at least gives this impression. In one of his most paradoxical statements he adjures the reader to "keep faith with the beginning, whose genesis is still to come."³⁵ This injunction, with all its playful ambiguity, might well be taken as the underlying theme of Ernst Bloch's work.³⁶

Notes

1. Neither Bloch nor Lukács denied that there was a "type" of individualism encouraged by middle-class society, but both argued that it was in no sense a healthy or creative individualism. On the contrary, its "aimless freedom" led to a subjectivism without content—a hopeless split between a perceiving subject and his objective world. This happened because the bourgeoisie had a "fear of the concrete"; they were estranged from, and unable to cope with, the reality that they themselves produced. In other words, the bourgeoisie had lost its sense of "totality" which in the meantime had passed on to the proletariat.

2. See Ernst Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1964; original edition Fleishel Verlag, 1918), p. 333; and Georg Lukács, *Die Seele und die Formen* (Berlin, 1911). In English, see the translation of Lukács' early (1920) essay "The Old Culture and the New Culture," *Telos*, no. 5 (Spring, 1970), pp. 21–30.
3. This, of course, did not mean that the suffering of the working class was inconsequential to them. On the contrary, the worker's anguish was the sharpest edge of the whole crisis of capitalism—a crisis which the intellectuals necessarily experienced in more "intellectual" and cultural terms. Despite these differences, the solution was the same for the proletariat and the intelligentsia, i.e., revolution, the abolition of bourgeois society.
4. Georg Lukács, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1955), p. 250; cited in Victor Zitta, *Georg Lukács' Marxism, Alienation, Dialectics, Revolution* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1964), p. 76.
5. See Fredric Jameson, "The Case for George Lukács," *Salmagundi*, no. 13, (Summer, 1970), p. 20; Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (Berlin: Malik Verlag, 1923), 57ff., 164ff.; and Bloch's comments on Lukács in "Aktualität und Utopie. Zu Lukács 'Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein'" (originally published 1924) in *Philosophische Aufsätze zur objektiven Phantasie* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1969), pp. 598–621.
6. The circle included Simmel, Karl Jaspers, Emil Lederer, Friedrich Gundolf, Georg Lukács, and many others. Weber apparently respected Bloch's learning, but did not care for him personally because of his "naive" social behavior and "prophetic manner." See Paul Honigsheim, *On Max Weber*, translated by Joan Rytina (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1968), pp. 66, 109.
7. Walter Benjamin (whom Bloch met during his Swiss exile and remained close to during the 1920s) believed Bloch had perfected the German essay, as Brecht had mastered the form of the drama, and Kafka the form of the novel. See Walter Benjamin, *Briefe*, II, edited by Gershom Scholem and Theodor Adorno (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966), p. 603.
8. See Max Bense's comments in *Rationalismus und Sensibilität* (Krefeld and Baden-Baden: Agis Verlag, 1956), pp. 141–142.
9. For a discussion of this Hegel dispute between Bloch and his East German critics, see Helmuth Büttow, *Philosophie und Gesellschaft im Denken Ernst Blochs* (Berlin: Osteuropa-Institut, 1963); and Iring Fettscher, *Karl Marx und der Marxismus* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1967).
10. A collection of some of the most hostile essays can be found in R. O. Gropp, ed., *Ernst Blochs Revision des Marxismus* (East Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1957). Nevertheless, Bloch persisted in his high estimation of Hegel; see, for example, his 1956 address on "Hegel und die Gewalt des Systems," included in *Philosophische Aufsätze zur objektiven Phantasie*, pp. 481–500.

11. See Bloch's comments in *Die Welt*, no. 219 (September 20, 1961).
12. Cf., *Naturrecht und menschliche Würde* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1961); *Philosophische Grundfragen: zur Ontologie des Noch-Nicht-Seins* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1961); *Verfremdungen I, II* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1962, 1964); *Tübinger Einleitung in die Philosophie I, II* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1963, 1964); *Widerstand und Friede: Aufsätze zur Politik* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1968).
13. Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, vol. III (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1959), p. 1412; and Ernst Bloch, *Man on His Own*, translated by E. B. Ashton (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), p. 161.
14. Lucio Magri, "What Is a Revolutionary Party" *New Left Review*, no. 60 (March–April 1970), p. 99.
15. Ernst Bloch, *Spuren* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1969; first edition, 1930), p. 32.
16. Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, I, p. 230.
17. The *novum* in the latter sense is the concretization of ideals that previously appeared only as abstractions. Its substance is "that-which-is-not-yet, that which is drifting and dreaming in the darkness of life, in the factual blue of objects . . . as content of the deepest hope and awe" (Ernst Bloch, *Geist der Utopie*, p. 345; *Man on His Own*, p. 71). Here Bloch makes a distinction between the *novum* (that which "has not come to be in the past") and the concept of *renovatio* (the renewal of that which is already complete in the past). Whereas *renovatio* means the reintroduction of what has been and is merely lost, the *novum* means a "return to the still undervived derivation of all that happens." The *novum*, therefore, is unsettling because it brings into the present "what was always intended but has never come to be." It is recollection, but always recollection of what has not become; it is also loyalty, but "loyalty to hope." (Ernst Bloch, *Tübinger Einleitung in die Philosophie*, II (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1968), p. 165; *Man on His Own*, pp. 83–84.)
18. As Ivo Frenzel has put it: "[Bloch's] philosophy maintains, in contrast to Hegel, that the owl of Minerva takes flight not in evening, but at the break of dawn which promises a [new] day still far below the horizon." (Ivo Frenzel, "Philosophie zwischen Traum und Apokalypse," *Über Ernst Bloch* [Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1968], p. 33.)
19. Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, p. 285.
20. The best and clearest discussion of this in English can be found in Jürgen Moltmann, *Religion, Revolution, and the Future*, translated by M. Douglas Meek (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1969), Chap. viii, pp. 151ff.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
22. Karl Marx, *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, edited and translated by Lloyd Easton and Kurt Guddat (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), pp. 306, 307.

23. Jürgen Habermas, "Ein marxistischer Schelling," *Theorie und Praxis*, vol. II, Berlin, 1963; translated as "Ernst Bloch—A Marxist Romantic" in *Salmagundi*, no. 10–11 (Fall–Winter 1970), pp. 311–325.
24. See Jürgen Moltmann, "Ernst Bloch: Messianismus und Marxismus," *Kirche in der Zeit*, 15, no. 8 (1960); and Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Der Gott der Hoffnung," *Ernst Bloch zu ehren*, edited by Siegfried Unseld (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1965), pp. 209–226. Pannenberg's essay has been translated in *Cross-Currents*, 18, no. 3 (Summer 1968), 284–295.
25. See the essays collected in R. O. Gropp's *Ernst Blochs Revision des Marxismus*. The whole book is a polemic against Bloch's "deviationism."
26. For Bloch, the essence of Marxism is precisely its openness to new material and its irrepressible revolutionary attitude toward the world. That excludes, perforce, any identification of Marxism with "orthodoxy" or "dogma" (a reference to existing Communist states). Marxism is nothing if it is not the constant reaching for new depths, the refusal to hold back. See Ernst Bloch, *Widerstand und Friede. Aufsätze zur Politik* (Frankfurst-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1969), p. 71.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
28. Ernst Bloch, *Freiheit und Ordnung; Abriss der Sozialutopien* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1969), p. 180; and *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, pp. 726–727. Marx, says Bloch, represents the unity of "Hoffnung und Prozesskenntnis"; within a single perspective he contained both a consciousness of the goal and an analysis of the given. This is "realism"—the fruitful blending of a "forward projection" with practical knowledge and sound deliberation.
29. Ernst Bloch and Fritz Vilmar, "Ein Gespräch über ungelöste Aufgaben der sozialistischen Theorie," *Über Ernst Bloch*, p. 85; and Ernst Bloch, *Widerstand und Friede*, p. 27.
30. Ernst Bloch, *Tübinger Einleitung*, I, p. 100; *A Philosophy of the Future*, p. 68.
31. Henri Lefèvre develops this insight independently of Bloch. See his "Reply to Roderick Chisholm and Comments," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 30 (September 1969): 22ff. See also Shierry Weber, "Individuation as *Praxis*," *Critical Interruptions: New Left Perspectives on Herbert Marcuse*, edited by Paul Breines (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), pp. 22–59; and Nick Egelson, "Re-creation: Self-Transformation and Revolutionary Consciousness," *Liberation*, 15, no. 2: 45–50.
32. These phrases are Bloch's: "die Mühseligen und Beladenen" and "die Erniedrigten und Beleidigten." See Ernst Bloch and Fritz Vilmar, "Ein Gespräch . . .," *Über Ernst Bloch*, p. 85.
33. Ernst Bloch, *Freiheit und Ordnung*, p. 180; *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, p. 726.
34. Bloch frequently speculates on the nature of Communist society, the resurrection of individualism there, and the possible "forms" that might

exist in a Socialist community. In English, see *Man on His Own*, pp. 39–41, 59–60, 142–143, 146.

- 35. Ernst Bloch, *Tübingen Einleitung*, II, p. 179; *Man on His Own*, p. 92.
- 36. All of Bloch's chief works (and some of the more important German sources on Bloch) have been cited in the text or in the footnotes. Nearly the whole corpus of his writings—from *Geist der Utopie* to his most recent political essays—are presently being collected by Suhrkamp Verlag (Frankfurt-am-Main) and published in fifteen volumes. However, for the English reader the following translations from Bloch are worth consulting: (1) *Man on His Own*, translated by E. B. Ashton (New York, 1970). The best collection of Bloch's writings in English, though heavily weighted with religious essays. (2) *On Karl Marx* (New York, 1971). Essays mainly from the 1950s and 1960s, including Bloch's famous analysis of Marx's "Eleven Theses on Feuerbach." (3) *A Philosophy of the Future*, translated by John Cumming (New York, 1970). A translation of *Tübingen Einleitung in die Philosophie*, I. (4) *Spirit of Utopia* (New York, 1971). A translation of *Geist der Utopie*. (5) "Man as Possibility," *Cross-Currents* 18, no. 3 (1968). A speech delivered in Vienna in 1965. (6) *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch's most important work, is to be published by Herder and Herder in 1972.

Some secondary sources on Bloch in English are: (1) Paul Breines, "Bloch Magic," *Continuum*, 7, no. 4 (1970). Bloch in relation to his age. (2) Harvey Cox, "Forward," *Man on His Own* (New York, 1970). Brief introduction to Bloch from a theological perspective. (3) David Gross, "Man on His Own," *Continuum*, 7, no. 4 (1970). Comments on Bloch in relation to Hegel and Feuerbach. (4) Jürgen Habermas, "Ernst Bloch: a Marxist Romantic," *Salmagundi*, no. 10–11 (Fall–Winter 1969–1970). Critical of Bloch's utopianism. (5) Jürgen Moltmann, "Introduction," *Man on His Own* (New York, 1970), for biographical comments; and *Religion, Revolution, and the Future*, translated by Douglas Meeks (New York, 1969). Contains a chapter on Bloch entitled "Hope and Confidence" which is the best brief introduction to Bloch in English. (6) Paul Piccone, "Bloch's Marxism," *Continuum*, 7, no. 4 (1970). Bloch as a neglected Marxist in the English speaking world. (7) Jürgen Rühle, "The Philosopher of Hope," *Revisionism: Essays on the History of Marxist Ideas*, edited by Leopold Labedz (New York, 1962). Brief discussion of Bloch's ideas, and the dispute over his "revisionism."

5

Karl Korsch's “Marxism and Philosophy”^{1*}

Mihály Vajda

In recent decades the so-called “extensional” conception of Marxist philosophy as the science of the most general laws of reality has become the official view in the Socialist countries and has been widely accepted elsewhere.² According to this view any other conception of the function of philosophy appears to be in opposition to the essence of Marxism. Such a view can arise and harden into a prejudice, however, only if the historical circumstances in which the “extensional” conception arose are not made clear; if, that is, we do not show through analysis of the historical documents that the current official viewpoint not only was not at all obvious to theoreticians of the Leninist period, but, in fact, did not even exist in its present form.

Karl Korsch’s “Marxism and Philosophy” is a central—if not the most important—text of that tendency in Marxism which, in

* This selection is a translation of a review of the new edition of *Marxism and Philosophy*, the central work of the early Korsch. The review was written in 1968 and appeared in *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle* (*Hungarian Review of Philosophy*), vol. 10, no. 1 and could not be revised for this volume. The author is a Hungarian philosopher who has been associated with the Lukács circle in Budapest. The work of the later Korsch is discussed by Stanley Aronowitz elsewhere in this volume.

contrast to both revisionism and the so-called orthodox Marxism of the Second International, as well as to the then developing "extensional" concept, emphasized the moment of activity and the unity of theory and practice in Marxist philosophy. The works of Antonio Gramsci and Georg Lukács, for example, must be regarded as more significant theoretical formulations than those of Korsch. Nevertheless, his essay formulates, perhaps in the most characteristic and popular form, the principal issues on which this tendency (generalizing from the experience of the revolutionary tide after the First World War and especially the October Revolution in Russia) opposed both the "Marx-orthodoxy" represented by Franz Mehring and Karl Kautsky, and all those who deny the necessity or relevance of any philosophical conception for the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. "Marxism and Philosophy" centers on the question most fundamental to the discussion: the relationship between the proletarian revolution and Marxist philosophy.

Korsch begins with a criticism of those contemporary theoreticians of the movement and bourgeois "Marx scholars" for whom Marxian theory not only was not founded upon a definite philosophical conception, but actually negated any kind of philosophy whatsoever. In this respect, as Korsch noted, he excepted those theoreticians of the period who, precisely because they did *not* consider themselves orthodox Marxists, wanted to do away with this allegedly antiphilosophical element in Marxism and, accordingly, attempted to find a basis for the materialist conception of history in one or another bourgeois philosophical standpoints, be it Kantianism or Machism.³ Kantian "Marxism" was popular primarily in Austrian Marxist circles, with Max Adler as its most important representative, while Machist "Marxism"—as is well known from Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism: Critical Notes Concerning a Reactionary Philosophy*—was very much in vogue with the Russians. Yet Korsch clearly sees that it is the representatives of left-wing Marxism, above all Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg, who realized that Marxism does not mean the negation of philosophy as such, but only the negation of bourgeois philosophy—the latter, however, under all conditions. It is to Lenin that Korsch refers when, in connection with the Machist "Marxists," he indicates the road Marxist theory is bound to take if it is based on *any* kind of bourgeois philosophy: "The road down which Machist-Marxism necessarily leads its followers—and most of the latter have meanwhile taken this road—was clearly re-

vealed by Lenin in 1908 in his confrontation with Empirio-criticism.”⁴

For Korsch the fact that this insight appeared on the left wing is not a mere coincidence. In his view, the obscuring of the philosophical content and meaning of Marxism is clearly connected with reformism and a turning away from the revolutionary aims of the movement. Truly revolutionary theory and philosophy can only exist, according to Korsch, as integral parts of the revolutionary movement, just as their rise is related to and explained by the rise of the proletarian movement: “The emergence of the Marxist theory is, in Hegelian-Marxist terms, nothing but the ‘other side’ of the emergence of the real proletarian class-movement; only both sides together form the concrete totality of the historical process.”⁵

In all this, I believe, Korsch is correct. At the same time, however, I regard his *periodization* of Marxism’s development, which in “Marxism and Philosophy” is supposedly based on the practical development of the proletarian movement, as problematic. The first period is said to close with the end of the revolutionary wave of 1848, and its theoretical framework is said to be given in Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. The second period terminates with the new upswing of the revolutionary proletarian movement at the turn of the century and is followed by a third period still in process at the time the essay was written in 1923. Since, according to Korsch, truly revolutionary theory is possible only as part of actual revolutionary practice, the theory of Marx and Engels itself had to change during the low tide of revolution in the second part of the last century. He did not, however, take this to mean that the theory elaborated in their writings ceased to be revolutionary:

Even in its further-developed form as scientific Socialism the Marxism of Marx and Engels remains the encompassing *whole* of the theory of social revolution. The change consisted only in the fact that in this later phase the various components of the whole—economics, politics, ideology; that is, scientific theory and social practice—moved further apart from one another.⁶

If Korsch were consistent in his *rigid* interpretation of the unity of theory and practice, the turn of events in 1848–1850 should have led him to posit a radical change within the development of Marxian theory itself. What he does, in fact, assert is that

only with the *followers* of Marx and Engels does scientific socialism become a complex of *purely scientific* theories that have no direct connection to any form of class struggle.⁷ Korsch convincingly criticizes the theoreticians of the Second International who, having separated the "*scientific truth*" of Marxism from its practical application, turned Marxism into a "value free" objective theory and political practice. Furthermore, he shows that the Marxian dialectical unity of object and subject, once fragmented, resulted in a standpoint that fell back not only behind Marx, but even behind classical German idealism.⁸ Korsch is perfectly right in pointing out that, just as the retreat of the revisionists (namely, Eduard Bernstein and his followers) from the revolutionary character of Marxian theory directly corresponds to their political practice, so does the transformation of revolutionary theory into transcendent, scientific truths of the "*orthodox*" theoreticians correspond to a shift in their political practice, which projected the revolutionary transformation itself into the distant and abstract future.

Korsch characterizes the third period—which began roughly in 1900—as both a return to original, revolutionary Marxism and a further development of its contents. In Korsch's view, this return and further development—the fundamental assertion of "Marxism and Philosophy"—entails a correct interpretation of the relationship of Marxism to philosophy. In other words, Marx's and Engels' negation of philosophy—and they do indeed state views to this effect in both periods of their work—cannot be interpreted as stemming from indifference to the philosophical point of view. As Korsch indicates:

the basis on which we can speak of a surpassing of the philosophical standpoint is threefold: 1) the theoretical position taken by Marx does not stand merely in one-sided opposition to the consequences, but in all-sided opposition to the presuppositions of all German philosophy hitherto . . . ; 2) Marx thereby placed himself in opposition not simply to philosophy, which is only the head, only the ideal extension of the existing world, but to the totality of this world; 3) and above all, this opposition is not merely theoretical, but simultaneously practical and active.⁹

Thus, the negation of philosophy means more than just the negation of philosophy as mere ideology (that is, false consciousness),

from the point of view of some purely scientific, “objective” consciousness. It means the negation of the presuppositions of all philosophy, idealist and materialist, up to the present—namely, bourgeois society and, correspondingly, the abstract individual—as well as the negation of the merely “explanatory” role of philosophy from the point of view of the world-transforming proletarian revolution. Again, in Korsch’s own words:

The real opposition between Marx’s scientific Socialism and all bourgeois philosophies *and sciences* is based entirely on the fact that scientific Socialism is the theoretical expression of a revolutionary process which culminates in the complete supersession [*Aufhebung*] of bourgeois philosophies *and sciences* and simultaneously with the supersession of the material relations which find their ideological expression in these philosophies *and sciences*.¹⁰

This relation of Marxism and philosophy follows from the fact that Marxism’s conception of the relationship between being and consciousness is a negation of the presuppositions of all previous idealism and materialism. For Marxism, consciousness—everyday, scientific, and philosophical—is neither an empty phantasm nor a dependent “reflection” of the real, material processes of development. Consciousness, including scientific and philosophical consciousness, *is a real and constitutive element of the established reality itself*. Classical bourgeois political economy and philosophy form moments in the functioning of bourgeois society, just as do all social intercourse, property relations, and other material elements of the superstructure such as the state. Korsch writes:

The materialism of Marx and Engels is a scientific method only because it is dialectical, not abstract and naturalistic. According to their materialist dialectic, the pre-scientific, the extra-scientific, as well as the scientific consciousness of the natural and especially of the historical-social world no longer face this world autonomously and from without, but rather stand in the middle of this world as one of its real, if also “ideal,” component parts.¹¹

This interpretation of historical-social consciousness makes it possible to understand the unity of theory and practice in Marxism: since the consciousness of any definite historical-social formation is part of that very formation itself, the revolutionary

transformation of that established reality *presupposes a complete unity of the theoretical and practical sides of revolutionary change.* The transformation of the material relations between the members of society must at the same time, and in inseparable unity, mean the transformation of the consciousness of that society. It is, in Korsch's view, a completely false interpretation of Marx's thought "to claim that . . . the practical critique simply takes the place of the theoretical critique. For Marx, the dialectical materialist, the rational solution to all mysteries which theory has transformed into mysticism lies not in human *praxis* alone but in human *praxis* consciously comprehended."¹² In this way, the critique of ideology and the critique of political economy do not simply constitute a secondary and *independent theoretical* task, the accomplishment of which merely helps to develop the practical process of proletarian class struggle: on the contrary, they constitute one of the central elements of this very process itself.¹³

This, in essence, is the argument of "Marxism and Philosophy." In fact, it is the common, fundamental idea of that Marxist philosophical tendency of the twenties which one might call, following Antonio Gramsci, the "philosophy of practice." Furthermore, we can regard this interpretation of Marxian philosophy as a *theoretical formulation of Lenin's political practice.* It contrasts not only with the antiphilosophical, scientistic theoretical position of the Second International, but also with the philosophical standpoint (the "extensional conception") that, having received its first comprehensive and theoretically pretentious formulation in Nikolai Bukharin's *Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology* (1921), gradually gained a preeminent position in Marxist thought in the late twenties and early thirties.¹⁴ All those who in today's philosophical discussions oppose Stalin's Bukharin-inspired "extensional" conception and represent the "philosophy of practice" standpoint—I myself belong to this tendency—accept the fundamental ideas of Korsch's "Marxism and Philosophy" outlined above. This is true even if they know that there are many *basic* questions for which no solutions are offered in this work or, rather, are offered in a manner that many adherents of the "philosophy of practice" do not agree with. I for one regard as unacceptable the line of criticism along which the adherents of the "extensional" conception—essentially in complete harmony with the Social Democrats—attacked Korsch's essay.¹⁵ At the same time, however, I also consider the point of view from which Korsch rejects these criticisms in his "The Present State of the Problem 'Marxism and

Philosophy' " (first published in 1929 as an introduction to the second, German edition of "Marxism and Philosophy" and reprinted in the volume under review here) to be in many respects mistaken. It would be quite *unjustified* to claim that the 1929 introduction is *inconsistent* with the "Marxism and Philosophy" of 1923. Nevertheless, it emphasizes and elaborates a rather problematic element of the original essay to which we shall now turn.

The fact that Korsch does not uncritically accept the work of the later Engels or Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* is *not* in itself problematic. After all, in their specifically philosophical works, both these thinkers express views to which adherents of the "extensional" concept indeed have the right to refer. Thus, an interpretation of the Marxian, materialist dialectic in the spirit of the "philosophy of practice" inevitably entails an acceptance of Korsch's assertion regarding the theories Lenin developed in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and the "Marx-orthodoxy" that followed *that* Lenin: "In their notion of the relation between theory and practice, as it exists in general, and within the revolutionary movement itself in particular, they completely regress behind the Marxian, materialist-dialectical conception to an utterly abstract standpoint that counterposes a *pure theory*, which discovers Truths, to a *pure practice*, which applies these Truths, once discovered, to reality."¹⁶ Nor, further, can we regard as unfounded Korsch's statement that from the standpoint of this latter concept of Marxism, Marx's "setting the Hegelian dialectic on its feet" ultimately means no more than a terminological change in which matter is substituted for Hegel's "Spirit" as the new absolute. For according to *this* materialism the individual, construed as the sole subject, is "epistemologically" confronted with a reality "given independently of his consciousness" (i.e., matter), and the idea does not even arise, on the philosophical level, that the "reality" of man, far from being independent, is itself a human product. In other words, such a standpoint falls back to the level of pre-Marxian materialism.¹⁷

What makes Korsch's perspective theoretically problematic, however, is the fact that the *justified* refusal of any kind of absolute leads, in his case, to a break in the *actual continuity of the historical process*. In his words:

Marx's and Engels' materialist overturning of Hegel's idealist dialectic consisted only in liberating the latter from its final mystifying shell;

it consisted, that is, in discovering the *real historical movement* hidden beneath the dialectical "self-movement" of the Idea and in proclaiming this revolutionary historical movement as the last remaining absolute.¹⁸

Yet, as is clear even in "Marxism and Philosophy" (1923), for Korsch the "Essence" of the actual historical process is ultimately identical with the "Existence" of concrete, empirical movements at any given time. In other words, he lacks the Marxian historical-dialectical concept of "human essence" and is, therefore, unable to grasp the historical process of the objectivation of essential human powers. Thus, history becomes for Korsch the mere sequence of revolutionary flows and ebbs, *possessing no organic relation to each other*, and *humanity's future-oriented historical consciousness and self-consciousness is identified at any given time with the consciousness and self-consciousness of the concrete-empirical movement.*

Therefore, in Korsch's view, it appears absurd to assume the existence of any kind of revolutionary theory during periods lacking a real revolutionary movement. More precisely, during the low-tide of revolution any theory that represents the ideal negation of the established reality is for him mere false-consciousness, empty ideology, a metaphysical "ought" contrasted with reality as it "is": "It goes without saying that any conception which ascribes to theory an independent existence outside the real movement would be neither materialistic nor even Hegelian-dialectical—it would simply be idealistic metaphysics."¹⁹ Here, however, Marx's fundamental assertion that "we connect our critique to *actual* conflicts . . . We only show [the world] the end toward which it really struggles . . .," is given a problematic interpretation. Korsch presents what for Marx is *essential consciousness* as if it were merely *the formulation and theoretical conceptualization of the empirical consciousness at a given moment*, rather than a raising of the instinctive revolt of a spontaneous movement to the level of the "generic" [*Gattungsmässig*]. The Marxian dialectic of being and consciousness is, thus, eliminated in the same manner as it was by the "orthodox" approach—although in the opposite sense. And if earlier I agreed with the fundamental idea Korsch formulated in his critique of the theorists of the Second International, namely, that the consciousness of any given social formation is not a mere reflection, but rather an actual element of this formation's material base, now it is time to point out the weakness of the *original* Korschian view itself.

For Korsch, the practical-material relations of men and the institutions and consciousness that correspond to them all form a closed unity whose components *are only related to each other* and, thus, do not provide any real possibility for transcending them. He views human history as a series of closed formations—closed even in regard to their consciousness. Korsch does not realize, however, that in the course of its history humanity continuously unfolds new essential forces in the form of objectivations of its faculties and needs—even if, during its “pre-history,” this occurs in an alienated manner. Hence, he also does not recognize the fundamentally important fact that the various ideal objectivations (such as art, philosophy, morality and even religion, all of whose origins are inseparable from actual historical periods of humanity) could and did become carriers of values that even in their historically limited form *embody the continuity of man's consciousness and self-consciousness*. According to Korsch, then, the moment of ideality is never more than a moment *within* the functioning of the established social totality; it does not include the “something more” that represents the continuity in the discontinuous life of social forms, as well as in the discontinuous life of the revolutionary movements. As Korsch indicated, “Economic, political and judicial ideas . . . only express, in their particular ways, the whole of bourgeois society. The same can be said of art, religion and philosophy.”²⁰ Likewise, he asserted that the Marxian critique “is intimately linked to the working class's practical struggle for liberation; it understands itself to be simply the theoretical expression of that struggle.”²¹

In this respect Korsch's theory is consistent. For not only does he not uncover some kind of historical continuity in the ideal moments, but sees no continuity even with regard to the objectivations of the labor process (which are certainly the *most fundamental* objectivations of essential human powers). Korsch, in other words, does not realize that although under conditions of capitalist production the objective results of human labor become alienated from man, hostile to him, subjecting him to their domination—i.e., materialized labor becomes capital—nevertheless, the objectivation occurring in and through the labor process (the creation of materialized labor itself) is an indispensable condition of the existence of living labor and of the historical advance of essential human powers. That is, Korsch does not realize that *without the reification of human faculties and needs, there is no human history*. This understanding, which is indis-

pensable to the Marxian materialist conception of history, is missing from Korsch's work.²²

Furthermore, this lack in Korsch's theory results in basic inconsistencies in his interpretation of the second period of the development of Marxism. For as noted earlier, Korsch insists that even in its second period the Marxian-Engelsian theory is more than mere, empty ideology, and it remains "a comprehensive theory of social revolution." His interpretation becomes consistent, however, with the argument—presented in the 1929 introduction—that in the second period not only their followers but Marx and Engels themselves were turning away from philosophy in general and toward a "positive, socialist science," while at the same time they were subject "to an apparently contradictory but actually complementary philosophical development . . . the essence of which can be characterized as a sort of return to Hegel's *philosophy*."²³ It cannot be my task to examine this claim here.²⁴ Nevertheless, we have to reject the idea that in the second half of the nineteenth century the theory represented by Marx and Engels became a mere ideology, an empty, metaphysical "ought" contrasted with the given proletarian movement. We have to reject this idea even if it is true that during this period there was no proletarian movement for whose immediate consciousness revolutionary Marxism would have been acceptable. Of course, it may be added, such a movement did not exist prior to 1848 either—a fact that Korsch fails to take into account.

Yet, from Korsch's point of view, there could have been no *real* revolutionary theory either during the second half of the nineteenth century. We would argue that, on the contrary, a theory that begins with a radical negation of the established capitalist society is no empty ideology if the actual conditions of this society allow for the *possibility* of an essentially critical and radical movement; indeed, such a theoretical negation is indispensable to the development of such a movement. In other words, in contrast to the individual, everyday consciousness that, under the given conditions, wishes to maintain its particularity and hence does not transcend those given conditions, a revolutionary consciousness has to be created based on generic values that, in turn, are mediated by generic objectivations. In addition, this revolutionary consciousness can only be brought to the spontaneous movement of revolt *from without*, since under conditions of alienation it is not possible to spontaneously transcend the everyday consciousness.²⁵

In his 1929 introduction Korsch quite consistently rejects this possibility. He writes: "It was only a case of making an eternal virtue out of a necessity of the era when such 'orthodox Marxists' as Kautsky and Lenin energetically argued that socialism could only be brought into the working-class movement from without, only from those bourgeois intellectuals who had linked themselves to the workers' movement."²⁶ In spite of his continued esteem for Lenin's practical activity, Korsch does not realize that in the very views of Lenin he criticizes as well as in his political philosophy generally, Lenin grasped and developed further the same dialectical point of view that Korsch himself defends in "Marxism and Philosophy" (1923) against the theory of spontaneity which was inseparable from the position of the Second International.²⁷ Furthermore, he does not realize that he himself makes a virtue of the vices of a certain period when he insists that the Marxism of the second half of the nineteenth century became a mere and empty ideology simply because the revolutionary movement was at a low ebb. In addition, in the 1929 introduction he has forgotten what he saw quite clearly in the 1923 essay: even the Lenin of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* sides with the "philosophy of practice," in opposition to the Second International's position. This, we would argue, is true of Lenin even if many of the positive solutions and, indeed, the whole direction of the positive solutions proposed in that work, characteristically originate in an antiphilosophical point of view.

I am convinced that there is an *inconsistency* between the *concrete* philosophical contents of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and Lenin's *entire* practical philosophical standpoint. According to the philosophical conception of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, philosophy as a "science" is able to describe the objective laws valid for the whole of reality, including society. In Lenin's view these laws determine the development of society independently of any human action. On the other hand, in his practical philosophy Lenin quite clearly sees the dialectic of being and consciousness by realizing that consciousness is in fact *not a mere reflection* of reality's objective processes but a moment within the social totality. Thus, in Lenin's practical view, the radical transformation of consciousness is not a mere consequence but a necessary condition for the transformation of the material relations of society. The revolutionary, critical transformation of society is, accordingly, a process involving the transformation of being and

consciousness, a process in which both moments, presupposing and determining each other, are transformed.

The lack of a unified conception of "generic [*Gattungsmässig*] being," of alienation and historical continuity in Korsch's work in the 1920s may not fully explain his later development, but at least it makes it understandable. I suggest that Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), based on an understanding of the problem of alienation and an analysis of the relations between immediate, empirical proletarian consciousness and "calculated" [*zugerechnetes*] class consciousness, formed a possible basis for its author to remain in contact with the Communist movement even after the collapse of the revolutionary wave in Europe following the October Revolution; it enabled Lukács to develop an attitude of self-criticism in examining his former "messianic sectarianism" and to understand the Soviet Russian development with all its contradictions.²⁸ This proved impossible, from Korsch's standpoint. As soon as he realized that the process taking place in the Soviet Union—due to Russia's underdeveloped situation—was to achieve essentially and initially capitalist and not socialist aims, he concluded that the theory of the Communist movement really *cannot* be a revolutionary theory. I would argue that the peculiarities of the Russian situation implied that before the Russian proletariat could fully appropriate the modern forces of production it had to *create* them by completing the structural transformation of the economy, necessarily with force. There was no alternative to the fulfillment of this task; any other way would have threatened the very existence of the Soviet Union. This task, which, to repeat, was *not yet a socialist task* due to the underdeveloped state of the country, could, nevertheless, be carried out in two different ways. One way was to recognize Russian underdevelopment and realize that the task to be achieved was no more than the creation of the necessary conditions for the transformation of society, for the abolition of alienated existence. The other was to identify the consciousness surrounding immediate tasks with Communist consciousness. The latter way was chosen. Thus, the Stalinist conception of Marxism was based on a thoroughly deterministic view of history, and, likewise, it eliminated the theory of alienation from Marxism. We must not, however, regard this development as necessary or inherent in the situation. The fact that the concrete movement (which, in the strict sense of this Marxian expression, was not really a movement any more) had

to devote itself to nonsocialist tasks does not necessarily imply that the *essential consciousness* of the proletariat had to become extinct in its theoretical form as well. Korsch's theoretical standpoint, on the other hand, would imply just this. And in practice it was necessary for him not merely to adopt a critical view of the distortions of social development in the Soviet Union and of the "extensional" conception of Marxism, which "established" and sought to justify those deformations, but also to make a complete break with the then existing proletarian mass movement.²⁹ As a result, it is absolutely true that his own ideas were "in this historical phase . . . from the very beginning not real *theory*, that is, not 'merely the general expression of the actual, on-going historical movement' [Marx] . . . but always no more than a ready-made *ideology* adopted from without."³⁰ If today Korsch serves as a theoretical basis for New Left movements, it only proves the truth of our critique.

Notes

1. *Marxismus und Philosophie* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1966), edited and with an introduction by Erich Gerlach. The volume includes the following works by Korsch: "The Present Situation of the Problem, 'Marxism and Philosophy,'" (1929); "Marxism and Philosophy" (1923); "The Standpoint of the Materialist Conception of History" (1922); "The Marxian Dialectic" (1923); and "On the Materialist Dialectic" (1924). The introduction by Gerlach, based on thorough philological work, is informative rather than critical in character. All citations from these works are from this edition (abbrev.: *MP*). [An American edition of Korsch's early essays has been published by Monthly Review Press, 1971.—Eds.]
2. The term "extensional" refers to the view according to which philosophy distinguishes itself from other sciences by virtue of its *extension* to the whole of reality and its laws of movement. In this "extensional" conception the idea of the dialectical unity of theory and practice, consciousness and being, is either relegated to a secondary position or is entirely eliminated from Marxist philosophy.
3. *MP*, pp. 76–77.
4. *MP*, p. 77.
5. *MP*, p. 87.
6. *MP*, p. 100.

7. *MP*, p. 101. Korsch's periodization is problematic in several respects beyond those discussed in this paper. For example, the fall of the 1848 revolutions resulted in a change not so much within the proletarian movement as in the behavior of the bourgeoisie.
8. *MP*, pp. 101–102, especially Korsch's critique of Rudolf Hilferding.
9. *MP*, p. 114.
10. *MP*, p. 109.
11. *MP*, p. 131.
12. *MP*, pp. 132–133.
13. The critique of ideology and the critique of political economy form a unity in Marx's theory. It is not true that the "young Marx" was primarily concerned with the philosophical criticism of ideology while the "mature Marx" focused his attention on the critique of political economy. In this regard it is worth noting that Korsch recognized the unity of Marx's standpoint without being acquainted with the *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (Cf. *MP*, p. 140).
14. Nikolai Bukharin, *Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology* (1921), (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1969). Both Lukács and Gramsci wrote reviews of Bukharin's book. See, Georg Lukács, "Technology and Social Relations" (1925, untitled in original), *New Left Review* 39 (September–October 1966), 27–34; and Antonio Gramsci, "Critical Notes On an Attempt at a Popular Presentation of Marxism by Bukharin," in *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (New York: International Publishers, 1957), 90–117.
15. Karl Kautsky's review of "Marxism and Philosophy" in *Die Gesellschaft*, vol. I (1924), 306–314, is the main document of Social Democratic criticism. The Communist criticisms are summarized in G. Bammel's foreword to the first Russian edition of "Marxism and Philosophy" (1924). Korsch's work appeared in two Russian editions in that year, the second containing no commentaries.
16. *MP*, p. 62.
17. Here I would like to indicate that Korsch's critique applies only to Lenin's philosophical positions in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Lenin's political-sociological theory and, above all, his revolutionary *practice*, represent a 20th century *development* of Marx's fundamental philosophical ideas. In the absence of Lenin's role in this respect, the Korsch-Lukács-Gramsci conception of philosophy could not have come into existence. On the other hand, in the Stalinist conception, which is based entirely on a still more rigid separation between the human subject and the objective world, the implications become particularly clear: dialectical materialism is simply an eclectic aggregate of materialist theory and dialectical method, while historical materialism is no more than the "application" of dialectical materialism in analyses of society.
18. *MP*, p. 61.
19. *MP*, p. 99.

20. *MP*, p. 135.
21. *MP*, p. 139. As a result of this conception—strange as it may sound—Korsch too objectively represents the negation of philosophy, since the generalized philosophical characterization of social existence is, from this point of view, nothing but empty ideology.
22. Actually, this moment is not simply missing from Korsch's work. His remark in "The Standpoint of the Materialist Conception of History" (1922, reprinted in the volume under review here), to the effect that the reified form of materialized labor becomes identical with alienated labor, with capital, under every and all conditions—including, Korsch implies, under socialism—indicates that he fully misunderstood Marx's position (p. 142).
23. *MP*, p. 38.
24. It would indeed be of fundamental importance to really clarify this issue, since not only Korsch, but many Marxists holding radically different views, assert that in Marx's development there was a change which entailed a negation of his early, "philosophical" period (most notably, of his *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*) and an elaboration of a new, "purely scientific" conception. Louis Althusser, for example, speaks of nothing less than an "epistemological rupture" in Marx's development and, although he dates the *coupure* or rupture as early as 1845, he suggests that only the works written after 1857 are really "mature." I myself share Lukács' view according to which the views expressed in the *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts* are—apart from terminological differences—identical with the conception of the mature Marx in the most important *philosophical* respects. It does not matter here that many elements of Marx's work in economics were not, in the early period, fully clarified. See Georg Lukács, *The Young Marx, His Philosophical Development, 1840–1844* (1955) (Stuttgart: Verlag Günther Neske, 1965). Of course, in order to substantiate Lukács' view one ought, besides analyzing the *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*, to clarify the philosophical position of the later Marx as expressed in the *Grundrisse*, *Theories of Surplus Value* and other posthumously published manuscripts. Although this task has not yet been fulfilled, I am convinced that on such a basis it would be possible to prove not only that the mature Marx's conception is not opposed to his philosophical position of 1844, but indeed, that the former develops organically out of the latter. Korsch, who regards the later period as "ideological," and Althusser, who holds the same view about the early period, are both mistaken. The situation is different, however, with regard to Engels' later philosophical writings.
25. In contrast to Korsch, Lukács in the same period clearly saw that "class consciousness is not the psychological consciousness of individual proletarians, nor is it the [mass psychological] consciousness of their aggregate: *it is the significance of the historical situation of the class become conscious of itself.*" Georg Lukács, "Class Consciousness," in *History and Class Consciousness, Studies on the Marxian Dialectic* (Berlin: Malik Verlag, 1923), p. 86.

26. *MP*, p. 46.
27. Again in contrast to Korsch, Lukács and Gramsci never forgot to refer to Lenin's *practical* philosophical standpoint. The idea of the "projection" of socialism into the proletarian movement "from without" stems, both in Kautsky's and Lenin's cases, from Engels.
28. At the same time, however, Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* contains many subjectivist elements not characteristic of Korsch's point of view—as, for example, Lukács' conception of nature. Lukács' subsequent criticism of his own, early "messianic sectarianism" and his view of the development of the Soviet Union is exhaustively examined in Ferenc Fehér's essay on Lukács in his book, *Magatartások* [Attitudes], in manuscript.
29. In 1924 Korsch emerged as a leading spokesman of the "ultra-Left" tendency in the Communist Party of Germany and in the Third International. In the Spring of 1926 he was expelled from the Party as an "ultra-Left" renegade. By that time he held the view that the Soviet Russian state and the Third International actually stood in opposition to the interests of the Russian and the international working class. During 1926–1928 the "Left Opposition," in which Korsch represented but one faction, fragmented rather rapidly into numerous, small and contending groups and finally dissolved completely as a significant political force. From the late 1920's until his death in 1961 in the United States Korsch worked independently and in isolation from any political organization.—Eds.
30. *MP*, pp. 45–46.

6

Antonio Gramsci: The Subjective Revolution

Romano Giachetti

Antonio Gramsci has a two-fold importance for the history of Italy and of the international revolutionary movement. On the one hand, his work represents one of the most advanced conceptions of revolutionary philosophy. On the other, Gramsci's writings have played a decisive role in shifting Italian culture as a whole from post-idealism to Marxism. Some have argued that Gramsci's works concerning aesthetics, history, literature, art, and pedagogy were merely "opportunistic positions" intended to serve his most important aim: revolution in Italy. On the contrary, any separation between these two phases of Gramsci's thinking runs counter to the essence of his philosophy. Although his revolutionary theory did not succeed in bringing about a revolution in Italy, it is nonetheless true that Italy's cultural development since the Second World War was—and to a great extent still is—Marxist in an overall sense, and Gramscian in particular instances. The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate that what was particularly important in Gramsci was the concept of "total revolution," a concept that included not only the violent (or gradual) take-over of political power by the proletariat of a certain country, but an effort to create a new civilization embracing change in all aspects of man's life and culture.

I. Culture and Politics

At the end of the Second World War Italy faced and celebrated the many responsibilities of political and cultural freedom. While the fall of fascism brought about a resurgence of artistic and intellectual activities, it immediately became clear that the twenty-year-old ideological and cultural "desert" left behind by the Fascists could only be revitalized by a major conceptual re-orientation. During its long dictatorship (1922–1944), the country had not produced anything important in art or literature, so that in spite of the new climate of freedom there was no basis on which to begin cultural reconstruction. And yet political life during the immediate postwar period was at its best in terms of the democratic choices that were present.

In the few years between the end of fascism and the most devastating moment of recent Italian history, the electoral confrontation of 1948, there were many cultural forces at work: there was the explosion of the "neorealist" cinema; and Elio Vittorini and Cesare Pavese had discovered American literature of the thirties, and they were fighting to import "the young, invigorating smell of earth" that came from the other side of the ocean. The Socialists wanted a "renaissance" of the "spirit of the Risorgimento," which, in the nineteenth century, had been the first revolutionary movement of modern Italy. And the Communists were trying to translate into Italian the Stalinist concepts of culture (as seen in what came to be called "Zhdanovism"). It was a very confused period, but it also was one of optimism and of great promise.

The immediate political future of the country was decided in the election of 1948 when the Popular Front of Socialists and Communists, who many thought would be the natural heirs of postwar society because of their opposition to fascism in the twenties, was defeated by the Christian Democrats and their allies. Everything now seemed to come into focus: in the political arena there was a clear division, with bourgeois forces on one side, and "leftist" forces in opposition. Unavoidably, the political outcome of the elections was paralleled in the cultural sphere. But while Marxism failed politically, it succeeded in establishing itself as the only solution to the many cultural problems created by multiple converging factors: the need to go beyond the traditional pro-

vincialism of Italian culture, which had always suffered from a so-called "inferiority complex" toward France; the experience, already assimilated through the works of Pavese and Vittorini, of the American and Russian writers; the revolt against the "hermetic" literature of the thirties, which even at its best had been almost entirely formalistic in order to escape Fascist censorship; the desire to find an "inner continuation" with the positive elements of the nineteenth and early twentieth century culture; and finally, the growing acceptance of the concept, so relentlessly debated in the immediate postwar years, of the interrelationship between political and cultural life.

While Marxism was central to this complex of forces, even more than Marxism, the key was Gramsci. Gramsci had been an active revolutionary and a political organizer up to his imprisonment by the Fascists in 1926. The bulk of his works were written in prison during the last ten years of his life. They were published only after the war, and therefore it was only then that his philosophy came to be widely understood as a rejection of Benedetto Croce's philosophy: the tie with the past that promised, in the view of the forces that gained control of the Italian government, to be the natural continuation of the pre-Fascist period. Thus, while the first ideological confrontation had produced a capitulation of the Left in the political context, in the cultural one a vigorous struggle raged between two world views—between nineteenth-century historicism and historical materialism, that is between Croce and Marx (as interpreted in Gramsci's works).

The primary issue in this cultural confrontation was the role of politics versus the role of art (which, as always with Italians, includes everything that is creative: literature, architecture, painting, music, etc.). Gramsci maintained that politics is the *summa* of everything. Art is a *political* statement, not because it contains a political message or because it deals with political or social topics, but because it is produced in a cultural dimension situated within the complex of social and political relations between the artist and society. This context is modified by the artist's creative interaction with and interdependence on the society around him. Croce, on the other hand, asserted that "art has a life of its own," is universal rather than contemporary, and is the work of the spirit rather than a product of social necessities.

At a time when everything (human beings as well as cities) seemed to need reconstruction, Croce was saying:

Poetry does not generate poetry; parenthenogenesis does not happen; what is necessary is the intervention of the “fecundative” element, of what is real, passionate, practical, moral. The most qualified critics of poetry warn, in this case, not to look for literary formulas, but, as they say, to “re-make” man. When man is “re-made,” and the spirit “refreshed,” giving birth to a new life of affection, then a new poetry if it will, will spring up.¹

But Gramsci countered:

Literature does not generate literature, etc., that is ideologies do not create ideologies, superstructures do not produce superstructures, except as a heritage of inertia and passivity: they are generated, not because of “parthenogenesis,” but because of the intervention of the “fecundative” element, history, revolutionary activity that creates the “new man,” that is new social relationships.²

Croce’s “new man” was to be born of a “refreshing of the spirit,” which would leave social structures untouched. Gramsci wanted first of all to create “new social relationships”—that is, a revolution. Croce defended the existing system; Gramsci wanted to destroy and transcend it. Croce made art a “privileged” activity; Gramsci wanted to make it a part of all human activities, to involve it in all that was happening to man. Art was to be an expression of man’s involvement in his time. This is meaning of Gramsci’s assertion that politics is the *summa* of everything: everything is politics, for everything is based on man’s activities within the context of society. Nothing human can happen apart from politics, not even art.

This polarization between Croce and Gramsci was the basis on which postwar Italy began its battle for cultural reconstruction. For Croce, art was the work of the suprahistorical “spirit,” expressing a beauty which has no reference to the contingent world of man’s history. It is an emotional phenomenon, with no connections to practical life. “Croce’s aesthetics are the conclusion, the extreme objectivization of the entire romantic approach to art, which is now ‘relaxed,’ no longer ‘passionate.’ ”³ For Gramsci, on the other hand, art contains “a vision of the world,” “an attitude toward life,” “a life-environment delimited by the work of art.” Gramsci’s aesthetics are basically *historical*. In particular, for Gramsci, Italian culture was from the Renaissance the “unilateral

expression of a weak ruling class, unable to create an organic, socio-national synthesis or bloc, the result of a fundamental socio-historical split between intellectuals and the people.”⁴ To this cultural past, Gramsci offered a new alternative:

To create a new culture does not only mean to make *original* discoveries on an individual basis. It also and especially means to critically popularize already discovered truths, make them, so to speak, *social*, therefore give them the consistency of basis for vital actions, make them coordinating elements of intellectual and social relevance. That masses of men be led to evaluate in a coordinated way the present reality is, *philosophically* speaking, a much more important and *original* fact than the isolated philosophic genius’s discovery of a certain truth, which is then left in heritage to small intellectual groups.⁵

In 1948, Italy faced a choice: either to continue nineteenth-century idealism, modified by Croce’s historicism—that is, continue the approach to culture and politics that had produced fascism; or to reject that approach in light of Gramsci’s theory that *no lasting revolution can be made when one of the essential components of radical change (political, economical, social, and cultural power) is missing*. In spite of the electoral victory of the bourgeois forces, the radical or revolutionary transformation of society was still the aim of all progressive forces. That is why a new generation of intellectuals rejected Croce’s philosophy (which remained the “cultural flag” of the reactionary forces) and turned to Gramsci’s ideas as the only means of consistent cultural development, thus vindicating his concept of “total revolution.” That concept proved to be the most profound accomplishment of Gramsci’s life.

II. Gramsci’s Life⁶

Antonio Gramsci was born on January 23, 1891, in the small Sardinian village of Ales. The early years of his life were decisive. His family was poor but large; education was a luxury that came last in the list of necessities. Nevertheless, it was apparent that his inclination had to be helped somehow. His mother, a strong woman of lower middle-class origin, knew the importance of

education, and, although he did not attend regularly, helped him to get through high school.

During the decade preceding World War I Italy, still capitalizing on its recently acquired unity, faced the first serious problems of economic growth. Industrialization was proceeding, though slowly. The working class was beginning to develop an embryonic political awareness, thanks to the active role played by the Socialists since 1895. It was obvious even to the young Gramsci that things were going to happen in the industrial cities of the North. He applied for a scholarship at the University of Turin together with, among others, a young man of similar characteristics, Palmiro Togliatti. Once accepted at the university, Gramsci moved to Turin where he lived with Angelo Tasca, an activist in the Socialist youth movement, and began attending literature and philosophy classes.

At twenty-two years of age he began his active involvement in politics by joining the Socialist youth movement. He continued to study the classics of Italian literature and philosophy but his health was so poor and his finances so precarious that he eventually had to drop the idea of earning his doctorate. By that time he had already become extremely active in the revolutionary movement. He wrote lucid articles on the Italian intervention in the First World War and began to criticize the Socialist party for its lack of "revolutionary strength." He became editor-in-chief of *Il Grido del Popolo*, organ of the youth movement, and it was one of his editorials that first openly attacked Tasca's (and the Socialist Party's) concept of "absolute neutrality."⁷

The Socialist Party favored "passive neutrality"—passive, that is, on the part of the working class, since it was assumed that the war was a capitalist war and, as such, could only strengthen the working class, no matter what its outcome. Gramsci pointed out that the working class would be profoundly affected by the war even if Italy did not intervene. He thought that an event of such gigantic proportions was an extremely important opportunity to educate the working class about the nature of social forces. Even at this early stage of his political development, Gramsci was projecting an "active" role for the working class on the historical plane.

The Socialists, to the contrary, acted on a double platform: they were satisfied with the functioning of their party in parliament, and they accepted a theory of revolution as an "historical inevitability." While they continued to clash in the parliamentary

forum with the liberals who controlled the government, they were convinced that the revolution would come more or less automatically when the process of historical development shifted the balance of social forces in favor of the working class. Their active role in politics was limited to supporting an occasional strike in Milan or Turin, organizing the unions, and, in the cultural context, reaffirming the principles that had made it possible for Italy to unite in 1870 after half a century of insurrections and bloody wars fought against Austria. For the sake of unity, their main target was still the Austrians (and their German allies), rather than the industrialists of the North who were creating impossible life-conditions for workers in the factories.

The interesting thing, given this political stance, is that the Socialists declared themselves Marxists. Marx was interpreted more as an analyst of the means of production than as a revolutionary thinker. In their view, Italy had already had a first revolution, the Risorgimento: they never analyzed the consequences of that revolution in terms of the relationship of the working class to the capitalists. The Risorgimento had liberated a good number of Italian regions from the Austrians, but it had not really changed social conditions in a radical way: there were still social-class divisions, there was still the aristocracy, even a king, and there was, above all, a capitalist class developing its control of society as industrialization proceeded, leaving to the working class the burden of backward social conditions.

The Socialists did refer to “a revolution to come.” In fact, they had been active since the beginning of the century in trying to develop a “socialist and revolutionary consciousness” among the workers. Unfortunately, their ideological framework centered more on the moral issues of justice and equality than on the crucial problem of how to subvert the structure of social forces. Gramsci, especially after Italian intervention in the First World War, clearly understood that that balance of forces had to be violently upset, and that in order to achieve this, the working class had to be led out of the isolation in which it was confined in order to play an active part in the social transformation. This view was in direct contrast to the Socialist vision of the “gradual assimilation” of the working class by the society at large.

News of the Russian Revolution had a profound impact on the Socialist party, which immediately split into two broad camps, the “revolutionary faction” and the “reformist faction.” The

former favored violent uprising, while the latter backed the democratic processes that would eventually lead them to power through a parliamentary majority. Although the crisis within the party did not fully explode until 1921, mainly because of Gramsci's opposition to a split, the upheavals of the postwar period were to provide the first crucial test of the Italian proletariat.

In the wake of the Russian Revolution the "revolutionary faction" held a secret meeting in Florence, which Gramsci attended. The leader of this faction was Amadeo Bordiga, a Neapolitan engineer who wanted to precipitate Italy down the path of the Russian experience. Gramsci opposed this view. In his opinion, the Italian masses were not ready for an insurrection of that kind. In addition, he felt that the Socialist party lacked initiative or imagination in that extremely sensitive moment. To cope with the situation Gramsci proposed the immediate establishment of proletarian cultural organizations to parallel directly political activities and to create the necessary climate for the revolutionary intervention of the working class. The name of the organizations (indeed a pearl of political wisdom) was to be "clubs of moral life." These clubs were later created in major districts of cities like Turin, Milan, and Genoa, and they functioned as "schools of revolutionary thought" where workers, students, intellectuals, and professionals, discussed the question of how the process of the revolution was intimately connected with the cultural climate. Authors like Honoré de Balzac, Émile Zola, Romain Rolland, Henri Barbusse, Anatole Lunacharsky, Max Eastman, and Marcel Martinet were read and discussed, literature was treated as a "living experience of revolutionary consciousness," and interpretations of past history and present reality were attempted.

A few days after the Florence meeting (December 1917), Gramsci shook Socialist opinion by publishing his famous article "Revolution against Capital," which contained an analytical interpretation of the Russian Revolution. Gramsci maintained that the Russian working class had gone beyond traditional interpretations of Marxism as a theory of "history inevitability," thereby proving that the process of industrialization was not unidirectional (since revolution had been possible in a country relatively less developed industrially than England or Germany). In Gramsci's opinion, this represented a "return to Marx" against

false interpretations of his theories. Gramsci's position was obviously an attack on the mainstream of the Socialists and highlighted even more his conception of the active intervention of the proletariat in history. With the war nearing an end, and the inevitable chaos of the postwar years approaching, Gramsci was devoting all his efforts to developing as deeply as possible a political and cultural climate in which revolution could occur. The primary tools he used to this end were: the "Clubs of moral life," revolutionary newspapers such as *L'Ordine Nuovo*, and the workers councils.

When *Il Grido del Popolo* folded, Gramsci went to work, with Togliatti and others, for the Turin edition of the Socialist newspaper, *Avanti!* This edition, with the weekly *Il Soviet* in Naples and *L'Ordine Nuovo* in Turin, formed the bulk of the political forces that three years later would found the Communist Party. In *Avanti!* but even more in *L'Ordine Nuovo* when he later took over its direction, Gramsci led the final attack on the Socialist Party. The Socialists still refused not only to acknowledge that a revolutionary situation existed at the moment (a refusal shared by Gramsci himself), but also to cooperate in developing one. The "reformists" within the Socialist Party still favored the democratic process and were violently opposed to armed insurrection.

By the summer of 1919 the working class was on the verge of a disorganized rebellion. The war had left the country devastated. The rhetorical, bombastic surge of nationalistic feelings among war veterans was exploited by the first Fascist groups. Living conditions were unbearable, especially in the factories, and the national economy was in a state of bankruptcy. The workers demanded better working conditions and higher salaries, but the unions, the only organizations that could establish any form of dialogue with the industrialists, had by that time become so impotent and so frozen by bureaucracy that they completely lacked a political sense of how to exploit the moment in a way favorable to the working class. At times they even collaborated openly with the capitalists.

Gramsci saw the dangers of an unstructured and premature revolution in such a highly sensitive context. Nevertheless, in Turin the workers refused to go to work and spontaneously occupied a number of factories. The moment of final confrontation seemed to be pushing irresistibly closer. The workers barri-

caded themselves inside their factories. Within months 150,000 Turinese responded to Gramsci's appeal and formed themselves into workers councils. Their families, women, children, and old people, helped them from outside. In parliament, the Socialists accused the ruling class of having betrayed the workers' justifiable demands. Gramsci and Togliatti began agitating in *L'Ordine Nuovo* for preparation for national insurrection.

But the capitalists knew that time was on their side: the revolutionary movement was weak, poorly supported by the Socialist Party, lacking national unity and leadership, hardly armed, betrayed by an army that failed to join the workers, and undermined by corrupt union men who eventually forced a compromise solution on the working class. While the police and the army surrounded the factories in the North, the southern farmers had already lost their first confrontation with Fascist groups. When the insurrection actually failed and the workers went back to work without having improved their conditions in the least, Gramsci argued that by now it should be obvious to everyone that more was needed than paralyzing industry in order to change the world. He hammered home the point that the workers had to become conscious and aware of their strength, and to organize it. He saw the "factory councils," or "workers councils," functioning inside the industrial complexes as "centers of proletarian life," future "organs of proletarian power" that would not only be vehicles of proletarian participation in the revolutionary process, but would bring to the workers a new conception, an alternative model of civilization to fight for. The councils, that is, would change the working class itself and pose it as the subject of the revolutionary process.

The councils differentiated themselves from both the unions and the party. They belonged to another plane of revolution. The unions and the party were still important factors in bringing about radical change, but the councils *were* the living embodiment of radical change itself. While Bordiga and his group based their revolutionary scenario on a small, politically aware minority that would eventually lead the masses (i.e., the vanguard party), Gramsci believed that the masses themselves had to conquer social power, and that they must not merely be led by a sophisticated segment of the revolutionary movement. The structure of the councils was based on this principle.

Organized around the councils, the factory was a "miniature

state," a projected communist state. In each department, workers were divided in teams, each one uniting different skills. Every team elected a head, and the council was formed by all team heads. The revolutionary practice adopted by the councils made each worker responsible to his team for the amount and quality of work done, and each team, in turn, was responsible to the factory council. "The existence of the council," wrote Gramsci, "gives the workers a direct responsibility in production, makes them improve their work, institutes a voluntary and conscious discipline, creates a psychology of the producer, of the creator of history."⁸ Each phase of the work process, analyzed by the workers as "collective act," acquired a different dimension, a new perspective. Work was no longer profit for the ruling class, but part of history, the process of the workers' creation of their own social world. The cultural transformation involved is self-evident: men were no longer to be the passive objects of the historical (productive) process, but were to be the authors of it.

The practice of the councils, together with the cultural activities of the clubs, helped create the climate of "revolutionary development" that Gramsci was trying to promote outside the party. The councils, it is true, did not exist for long. Moreover, they were activated only in a few cities (Turin most of all, but also Bologna, Milan, Genoa, etc.). Yet, they established in practice the basis of the concept of revolution that Gramsci would later elaborate, an original conception that involved a dialectical alternative to unions and parties. Gramsci wrote:

The real process of the proletarian revolution cannot be identified with the development and action of revolutionary organizations of a voluntary and contractual type such as the political party and the trade unions.

These organizations are born on the terrain of bourgeois democracy and political liberty, as developments of political freedom. These organizations, insofar as they implement a doctrine that interprets and predicts the revolutionary process, are the direct and responsible agents of the successive acts of liberation that the entire working class will launch in the course of the revolutionary process. And yet, they *are not* this process, they do not go beyond the bourgeois State, they do not and cannot encompass all of the revolutionary forces that capitalism provokes in its implacable path as a machine of exploitation and oppression. During the economic and political predominance of the bourgeois class, the real unfolding of the revolutionary process happens underground, in

the darkness of the factory, in the obscurity of the consciousness of the countless multitudes that capitalism subjugates to its laws. This development cannot be controlled or documented. This will be done in the future when the elements that constitute it (sentiments, habits, seeds of initiative and mores) will be developed and purified by the evolution of society and of the new place that the working class will occupy in the field of production.⁹

The theory that Gramsci was developing at this time as exemplified by his insistence on the importance of the "clubs of moral life," distinguishes his concept of historical change from other theorists' views (Bordiga's, and, for that matter, Lenin's): the theory of the intellectuals as the key *mediation* between the party and the masses, between the "conscious" vanguard of the revolutionary forces and the "unaware" proletariat. He knew that this gap had to be filled by the creation of a "new" type of intellectual. He wrote:

The mode of existence of the new intellectual can no longer consist of eloquence, the external and momentary arousing of sentiments and passions, but must consist of being actively involved in practical life, as a builder, an organiser, "permanently persuasive" because he is not purely an orator—and nevertheless superior to the abstract mathematical spirit; from technique-labor he reaches technique-science and the humanist historical conception, without which he remains a "specialist" and does not become a "leader." . . .¹⁰

In this activity, he interprets for the masses, and teaches them their role and the role of culture in their revolutionary development. At the same time he embodies within the political leadership of the revolution the "national-popular cultural demands" that justify and strengthen the purely political premises of the revolution. In other words, Gramsci thought that *real* (i.e., lasting) revolution could not be built except through the triad of "masses—intellectuals—party," standing for "revolutionary strength—cultural consciousness—political strategy," with the intellectuals acting as "mediators" of an otherwise bipolar revolutionary explosion.

In 1920 workers in Turin again occupied several factories, but once more the army intervened, assisted by some Fascist groups, and the insurrection failed a second time. The disorder

and chaos of those years made the implementation of Gramsci's theories impossible. By 1920 the revolutionary forces all over Europe, particularly in Germany and Eastern Europe, had suffered serious setbacks and defeats. Nevertheless, Lenin still believed that "in Italy there exist all the necessary conditions for a great proletarian revolution,"¹¹ and he spurred the Italian comrades on to action. The Socialists were relentlessly moving toward their moment of truth, impelled by their inability to exploit the post-war social crisis, their half-hearted support of the revolutionary initiatives (such as the Turin Councils movement), and the growing counterrevolution. The crisis of the Socialist party was a crisis of its entire conception of proletarian political intervention.

This crisis finally surfaced at the Seventeenth Congress of the Socialist Party (PSI), at Livorno, in January 1921. With strong prodding from representatives of the Third International, the left-wing camp walked out of the convention to found the Italian Communist Party (the PCI). The PCI at first was dominated by the extreme left wing of the proletarian movement, led by Amadeo Bordiga, which favored immediate preparation for armed insurrection under the leadership of an elite, politically sophisticated vanguard. Gramsci cherished the unity of the working class and feared (correctly) that the split would be a disaster for the Italian proletariat. (His name, "Gramsci! Gramsci!", was chanted from the floor of the convention as a synonym for unity.) But he nevertheless threw his lot in with the left-wing camp (he immediately became one of the prominent leaders of the PCI) because he believed that the proletarian struggle could only be carried forward on revolutionary ground and that the reformist Socialist Party was too politically bankrupt to accommodate itself to the crisis of the moment.

Gramsci was never keen on accepting the theory that revolution would take place when the vanguard's political readiness, as a surrogate for the revolutionary subjectivity of the working class, moved toward the "point of coincidence" with "objective conditions." He knew that a revolutionary process is a slow one, as is shown by his constant concern with the political *and* cultural development of the working class, his wanting to create cultural centers along with workers councils. He also knew, however, that both the "revisionist" assumption that capitalism would evolve toward a just society under socialist pressure, and the PSI's fatalistic view of the historical inevitability of revolution

were wrong. Moreover, he was aware of the threat posed by the Fascist counterrevolution.¹² This is why he embraced Leninism after the Livorno split as an “emergency” solution to the crisis facing the working class.

What followed was a disaster for all revolutionary forces. Bordiga’s program failed to bear fruit. The “aborted revolution,” as it was called, consisted of disorganized clashes with the Fascists and the army—the same army that Lenin was sure would fight with the workers instead of against them. The Fascists, well armed and equipped by the northern industrialists who gladly answered Mussolini’s appeal “against the Bolshevik menace,” were too strong even for the industrial communities of Turin and Milan. The working class, divided and weak, lacking any direct support outside that of the few Communist leaders who were still free to have a public life, soon surrendered to the mounting Fascist tide. The time of upheaval was over.

Gramsci had been almost alone in foreseeing the depth of the threat of fascism. But it was too late. Fascism triumphed and the revolutionary spirit of the Italian working class was thrust below the surface, where it would smolder for a generation. The revolutionary struggle changed from a “war of maneuver” to a “war of position.” During the next few years Gramsci was to represent his party in Moscow for a year, during which time he became intimately involved in the politics of the Third International, and then, upon his return to Italy, to succeed Bordiga as the preeminent leader of the now semi-legal PCI. These confused and complicated years had great import for the development of Gramsci’s thinking, but unfortunately we cannot attempt to summarize them here. In 1926 Mussolini had Gramsci arrested. The prosecutor at Gramsci’s trial urged that “we must stop this brain from functioning for twenty years,” and Gramsci was sentenced to over twenty years. He disappeared from the Italian and international political scene and spent the remaining ten years of his life in prison. He was released in April 1937, but he died two days later. The leadership of the Communist Party had by then passed to Gramsci’s former associate, Palmiro Togliatti. If Gramsci no longer influenced the day-to-day work of the PCI and the anti-Fascist resistance, nevertheless the prosecutor’s intention was foiled. During his prison years Gramsci’s mind functioned incessantly, reevaluating his entire political experience and leaving behind one of the richest legacies in the history of revolutionary thought.

III. The Prison Years and the Reorganization of Gramsci's Thought

When Gramsci was imprisoned in 1926, Italy was already a Fascist state, the Italian revolution had failed to get off the ground, the Russian Revolution had shifted from Leninism to Stalinism, the Third International existed as a revolutionary force only in theory, and all over Europe the alliance between the Social Democrats and reactionary forces had established itself as a new springboard on which a more advanced form of capitalism would develop. Gramsci began to reexamine the entire historical process that had brought the revolution to such an impasse.

Gramsci's health, always poor, found a hard test in Mussolini's prisons. In spite of this, working in unbelievable conditions, often harassed by prison guards, while outside his friends and comrades were disbanded, exiled or confined in other prisons, Gramsci wrote a number of notebooks, the famous *Quaderni del carcere*, in which he rethought and analyzed past experiences, revolutionary processes and theories, and Italian history and culture in all its aspects: philosophy, pedagogy, linguistics, literary and art criticism. He expressed more carefully than ever before his ideas on what he saw as the real, central problem of revolution: the formation of a new man, with a new culture, in a new intellectual dimension, for a new order.

The year 1917 was heralded as the beginning of a new revolutionary era. Given the many crises provoked in the capitalist camp by the war, successful revolution was then believed to be on the agenda if only the revolutionary leadership could make the *objective* conditions of social crisis coincide with the *subjective* strength of the working-class movement. This latter was judged in terms of the readiness of a political vanguard to precipitate insurrection. Lenin had fought for this view and had been successful. But the question over the long-run is, *how* successful? If the Russian Revolution could degenerate into the relationship between the Party and the masses that constituted Stalinism, had Lenin really been right in viewing the accelerated political awareness of the proletarian vanguard as a sufficient basis for carrying through the revolutionary transformation? Put in another way, did the capitulation of the bourgeoisie and a take-over of power in the name of the proletariat make the revolution "successful"? Or was more than that involved?

Gramsci wanted to go beyond both Leninism and the Marxism of the Socialists because he interpreted Marxism as a “philosophy of *praxis*,” philosophy in constant change, all the more rich and deep because it was open to unsuspected conclusions—conclusions that Marx himself may not have glimpsed. He also wanted to establish the theory of “lasting revolution”: as far as Italy was concerned, what had failed to occur in the open clash between opposing social forces needed to happen within man himself before revolution could possibly change the social structure. Gramsci wrote that “communists must insure the development of spiritual premises of the new order.”¹³ Through the painstaking work of an efficient political organization and through “spiritual [i.e., cultural] revolution,” the masses must be brought from a state of passive acceptance of the socio-economic objectivity of capitalism to revolutionary consciousness. This process could be based only on a total rethinking of the historical process that produced the twentieth century, particularly in terms of each unique national setting, an analysis of the forces that had produced the bourgeois state, of capitalism in all its aspects, of historical theories, even art. For Gramsci, in sum, acquiring revolutionary consciousness meant acquiring a new concept of culture.

What Communists had to accomplish was: to prepare the revolution not only outside but also *inside* man. For Gramsci “subjective revolution” meant not only revolution in class relationships, but in man himself; in his way of thinking, living, and relating to other human beings; in his culture as well as his role in society. He wrote: “It is true that inter-individual organisms [man, society of men, society of things (i.e., the material world)] have always received, until now, a mechanistic and deterministic meaning.” But communists must, he added,

elaborate a doctrine in which all these relationships are seen as active and in movement, establishing clearly that the source of this activity is man’s individual consciousness which knows, wills, strives, creates, because he already knows, desires, strives, creates, etc., and thinks of himself not as an isolated being but enriched by the potentialities offered to him by other men and by the society of things, of which he must have some knowledge.¹⁴

Mentioning Feuerbach’s famous assertion that “Man is what he eats,” Gramsci went on to say that: “By the same token man is

his clothes, his apartment, his particular way of reproducing himself, that is, his family," i.e., a whole complex of social relations of which he is the nexus.¹⁵ If bourgeois society is based on the concept of the "individual man" and produces a culture based on the same concept, the revolution must be based on a conscious, socially and culturally "collective man." The experience of the workers councils was a concrete attempt in this direction: to make men understand the social significance of their acts as workers, a step in establishing proletarian hegemony over means of production and the work process.

Lenin's "subjective revolution," on the other hand, had been based on the premise that the revolution, in order to be successful, had only to dismantle the entire social structure of the *ancien régime*. Lenin's "new man" was a new man literally: born at the moment of the revolution, produced by the new society, subject only to the forces at work (both politically and culturally) in the communist state. Gramsci had accepted this view earlier only in the hope that postwar Italy would prove a fertile ground for the development of such a "new man." Actually, he was never convinced that a real "new man" could be born whole, from nowhere, on the ashes of the past society without a slow, painstaking process of political transformation and education (which would in any case retain a historical heritage from the old society as a spring-board for the new culture).

This is why, in works such as *Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce*, *Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura*, *Note sul Machiavelli, sulla politica e sullo Stato moderno*, and *Passato e presente*, Gramsci systematically demolished Croce's "mythological" concept of history as made by forces foreign to the common man, a view which instilled fatalism in people.¹⁶ To Gramsci, history was man's creation, and culture had to become a tool for historical awareness. Even when accepting Croce's contribution as partially positive, since it had developed "on the ground of antitheological and antimythological polemic in favor of 'faith in modern civilization,' which does not need any transcendence or revelation,"¹⁷ he was quick to point out that that interpretation represented "the most powerful machine to make the new Italian social forces conform to the interests of the ruling class."¹⁸

This critique of Croce is but one example of Gramsci's attempt to rethink Italian culture. Countless others can be found in his *Quaderni*. Gramsci's prison years can therefore be described as

centered around the following main tasks: (1) reevaluation of Leninism as an “emergency revolutionary theory” and criticism of it as philosophy of “lasting revolution”; (2) formulation of a method of study to be used in the process of acquiring a Marxist view of the past, and, therefore, the outlines of a new culture; (3) elaboration of a revolutionary theory based on the assumption that in order to build a new society men have to change radically (culturally, and in their social relationships), even before—or perhaps during—the time that the revolutionary process takes place.¹⁹

While he was elaborating in prison his ideas on these three main points, the concept of revolution itself was changing in Gramsci’s hands. Italy learned of Gramsci’s interpretation of Marxism only after the Second World War, when his *Quaderni* were published in book form, along with his beautiful and touching *Lettere dal carcere*, letters that he had written to his family and friends and which contained a clear outline of his approach to culture. To him the long isolation was an opportunity to reaffirm all the ideas he had been formulating at earlier stages of his life: ideas that, as we have seen, were based on the conviction that a revolution cannot be successfully fought if men have not acquired a conscious historical awareness of their time and its background. Men, according to Gramsci, must educate themselves about the real meaning of *wanting* a new society, must understand (and be ready for) all the implications of creating a new order, must find in the interpretation of past history the strength, underpinned by a new culture, to radically modify the relationship between themselves, to upset the concept of individuality as isolation and affirm the concept of individuality as “original contribution to a collective life.” It is along these lines that Gramsci was creating the concept of the “new man.” As long as the “social morality” of men remained anchored to the structure of bourgeois society, no matter what change takes place in the political organization of a given country, the relationships between men were bound to produce the same quality of life as in capitalist society: exploitation (perhaps of different kinds), selfishness in human relationships, ambitions of an individual instead of collective type, and finally, a reproduction on a different level of all the wrongs that had been perpetrated in industrial society.

This is the profound difference between Lenin and Gramsci. In the years around 1920 Gramsci had been

Leninist for two reasons: first, because he was convinced, as was Lenin, that in the years immediately following the First World War the proletariat had no choice between immediate violent and evolutionary democratic revolution, since political and economic conditions forced it to opt for the first solution; and second, because he believed, as did Lenin, that policies that are right in themselves do not exist, and that policies are right only in relation to concrete situations. Therefore Gramsci was Leninist until 1926. But he went beyond Leninism, beyond, that is, the kind of revolutionary practice he himself had advocated until then, in the works he wrote in prison.²⁰

He went beyond Leninism, we may add, because he saw that Leninism had failed to produce in Russia the "new man," the only entity Gramsci considered essential to the development of a *true* revolution (which is more than just a change in the structure of the state).

One may argue, of course, that the kind of revolution that Gramsci had in mind relied on the "education" of the masses before the violent insurrection, and that the "education" he activated in the councils, in the clubs, and from the pages of *L'Ordine Nuovo* did not bring about revolution, while Lenin's faith in the political awareness of the vanguard succeeded at least in defeating the Czarist regime.²¹ This is true—but revolutions are events that do not last one day or a few years. In the overall picture of the twentieth century, in the future evaluation of the passage from capitalist to socialist society, the October revolution will count as only a first, and perhaps not too successful, step if we consider the development of the Soviet society after Lenin. In the last analysis, Marx indicated only the *possibility* of going from one stage to the next in the development of human societies. Different interpretations of Marxism will account for the more or less rapid and/or *lasting* implementation of that potentiality. Gramsci's interpretation "can be defined as describing the relationship between objective conditions and subjective political forces in a historical time already judged as mature for the establishment of the socialist power."²² Gramscian cultural revolution is more powerful than any concentration of capitalist means of repression, since it is fought in man's mind, in his consciousness, where military weapons have only indirect impact. The more thoroughly men understand the real meaning and political and cultural implications of class society, the closer they will get to

understanding the necessity of a historical transformation. Weapons, police, prisons, unilateral laws, and the like, can only succeed in delaying that historical process. Gramsci's concept of "subjective revolution" promotes the acceleration of that process and eliminates the risks of building a new society on false assumptions. In this sense, because it addresses itself to creating the "spiritual premises" of the revolutionary transformation of society, it has a more profound meaning for us today than any theories limited to or centered around the occurrence of a revolutionary crisis.

Notes

1. Benedetto Croce, *Cultura e vita morale* (Bari: Laterza, 1922), p. 245.
2. Antonio Gramsci, *Letteratura e vita nazionale* (Turin: Einaudi, 1950), p. 11. All Gramsci's works, including early and prison writings, have been published by Einaudi of Turin. Cf. Nikša Stipčević, *Gramsci e i problemi letterari* (Milan: U. Mursia, 1968) for a specific appraisal of A. G.'s thoughts on literature and the interrelationship between politics and culture.
3. Armando Guiducci, *Dallo Zdanovismo allo strutturalismo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1967), p. 128.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 123. Cf. Franco V. Lombardi, *Idee pedagogiche di Antonio Gramsci* (Brescia: La Scuola, 1969) for an analysis of the same concept as applied to pedagogy in the context of society. Gramsci's writings on pedagogy have appeared in *New Left Review*, no. 32 (July–August 1965).
5. Antonio Gramsci, *Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce* (Turin: Einaudi, 1953), p. 5.
6. For a biography of A. G., cf. John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967). Also, Giuseppe Fiori, *Vita di Antonio Gramsci* (Bari: Laterza, 1966), translated by Tom Nairn: *Antonio Gramsci: Life of a Revolutionary* (London: New Left Books, 1970).
7. All A. G.'s writings of the years 1914–1926, which did not appear in *L'Ordine Nuovo*, are collected in three volumes: *Scritti giovanili, 1914–1918* (Turin: Einaudi, 1958), *Sotto la Mole, 1916–1920* (Turin: Einaudi, 1960), and *Scritti, 1914–1926* (Turin: Einaudi, 1970).
8. Antonio Gramsci, *L'Ordine Nuovo, 1919–1920* (Turin: Einaudi, 1955), p. 38. On the characteristics of the "Workers councils," cf. "Soviets in

Italy," *New Left Review* no. 51 (September–October 1968), where a translation of A. G.'s thoughts on the subject appears; and Martin Nile Clark, *Factory Councils and the Italian Labour Movement 1916–1921*, thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D. at the University of London, 1966 (Library of the Istituto Gramsci, Rome).

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 123–124.
10. Antonio Gramsci, *Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura* (Turin: Einaudi, 1949), p. 7. Translated in Louis Marks (ed.): *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (New York: International Publishers, 1957), p. 122.
11. Cf. Giuseppe Fiori, "Comunisti," *L'Espresso* no. 2 (January 10, 1971), Rome.
12. Cf. Quintin Hoare, "What Is Fascism?" *New Left Review* no. 20 (Summer 1963).
13. Antonio Gramsci, *Socialismo e fascismo. L'Ordine Nuovo 1921–1922* (Turin, Einaudi, 1966), p. 149.
14. Antonio Gramsci, *Il materialismo storico*, cit., pp. 29–30, translated in: Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, edited by Louis Marks (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1957; New York: International Publishers, 1968), pp. 78–79. Cf. also: *The Open Marxism of Antonio Gramsci*, translated by C. Marzani (New York: Cameron Associates, 1957).
15. *Ibid.*, p. 30. (English edition: p. 79.)
16. *Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura*, cit., with the notes collected under the title *Il Risorgimento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1945), constitute a thorough analysis of 19th century Italy's intellectual and ideological climate. *Note sul Machiavelli* (Turin: Einaudi, 1949), and *Passato e presente* (Turin: Einaudi, 1951) are further attempts to create a "workable bridge" with past history as analyzed from a Marxist point of view. Cf. John M. Cammett, "Two Recent Polemics On the Character of the Italian Risorgimento," *Science and Society*, vol. 27, no. 4 (Fall 1963), and a forthcoming edition of A. G.'s prison writings (ed. by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Noel-Smith) to be published by Lawrence & Wishart, London.
17. Eugenio Garin, "Antonio Gramsci nella cultura italiana," *Studi Gramsciani* (Rome: Ed. Riuniti, 1958), p. 7. This work and *Gramsci e la cultura contemporanea* (2 vols.; Rome: Ed. Riuniti, 1969–1970) contain all interventions at the 1958 and 1967 conventions on Gramsci sponsored by the Istituto Gramsci of Rome, and are of fundamental importance for an analysis of current criticism of Gramsci's Marxism.
18. Antonio Gramsci, *Lettere dal carcere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1963), p. 132.
19. Cf. Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction to Gramsci," *The Nation*, vol. 205, no. 8 (September 18, 1967), and Mihailo Marković, "Gramsci on the Unity of Philosophy and Politics," *Praxis*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1967).
20. Giuseppe Tamburrano, "Fasi di sviluppo del pensiero politico di Gramsci," *La città futura: Saggi sulla figura e il pensiero di Antonio*

Gramsci, edited by Alberto Caracciolo and Gianni Scalía (Milan: Feltrinelli 1959), p. 117.

21. Cf. Gwyn A. Williams, "Gramsci's Concept of Hegemony," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 21, no. 4 (December 1960).
22. Massimo L. Salvadori, *Gramsci e il problema storico della democrazia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), p. 110.

Left-Wing Communism: The Reply to Lenin

Stanley Aronowitz

The revolution either devours its children or ignores them. Until recently the Council Communists were known chiefly as Lenin's antagonists in the pamphlet *Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*.¹ "J. Horner," the central "left" against which this polemic was directed, was actually Anton Pannekoek (1873-1960). Pannekoek, the Dutch poet Hermann Gorter, and the German theorist Karl Korsch, represented the most comprehensive ideological challenge to the hegemony of Lenin and his followers over the international revolutionary Marxist movement in the period between the two world wars.

I

The prominence achieved by the Council Communists during 1917-1923 is attributable to their consistent advocacy of workers' councils as both a form of revolutionary action of the working class and a new form of society. It was their insistence that political and social power during the transition from capitalism to socialism should remain in the hands of the workers themselves rather than in the revolutionary party or the state that made the

Council Communists a clear alternative to Leninist politics. At the same time, after the burst of revolutionary energy engendered by the crisis of world capitalism revealed by the First World War had been spent, the dominant tendency of international socialism was toward consolidation and retreat in the face of the capitalists' stabilization of power. The Council Communists were unwilling to adjust to the new situation. Against Lenin, they maintained that participation by revolutionaries in parliamentary and trade union politics did not serve the interests of the proletariat. Instead they criticized the Third International sharply for converging with the politics of the discredited Second International. After the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks and the suppression of the Soviets as effective instruments of workers' rule, the Council Communists became more than left-critics of the Bolshevik regime and the international Communist movement. Gradually they came to view the Soviet Union as a bourgeois regime, and the international Communist movement as nothing more than a servant of the Soviet ruling elite.

Pannekoek died in 1960 in virtual obscurity. Korsch's death the following year passed unnoticed except by a few scholars who knew his seminal work *Karl Marx*.

Although it cannot be said that the ideas of the Council Communists played an important role in defining the politics of the new libertarian Left of the last decade, the revival of their writings in recent years in Italy, France, and Great Britain, has served to reinforce the tendency in the radical and workers movement to stress the themes of workers self-management, participatory democracy, and decentralization of social power. Pannekoek and Korsch are spiritual precursors of the French students and workers who rose against bourgeois society in 1968, of the workers in Turin who occupied factories against the wishes of both owners and trade unions in 1969, and those who participated in the wildcat movements in industry and the university that spread in the United States in 1968 and 1970.

II

Anton Pannekoek was born in Holland in 1873. Like Lenin, he was of middle-class origin and he was educated as a natural scientist (he was a professor of astronomy). Pannekoek became interested in the "scientific" socialism of Marx and entered the

Dutch Social Democratic Workers Party while still a student. The influence of anarcho-syndicalism was strong within the party. Its non-Marxist founder Domela Nieuwenhuis, was an advocate of the mass strike and had turned away from parliamentary politics. Nieuwenhuis' unorthodox ideas produced a split in the party which led to the creation of an organization more akin to the "model" of German social democracy. Pannekoek and the poet Hermann Gorter joined the new party, becoming part of its left-wing. In 1909, this left-wing was expelled from the party, after which it formed the Social Democratic Party of Holland. Although Pannekoek went to Germany and joined its Social Democratic Party, lectured in party schools, and contributed to its theoretical organs, he remained closely associated with the Dutch Left group, including Gorter and Henriette Roland-Holst, who formed the Dutch Communist Party after the war.

In the period just prior to the First World War, Pannekoek emerged as a leading figure in the left-wing of the Second International. Many of his articles were published in the United States in such publications as the *New Review* and the *International Socialist Review*. Theodore Draper notes in his *Roots of American Communism* that "Pannekoek and Gorter were familiar names to many American socialists when Lenin and Trotsky were virtually unknown."²

On many questions Pannekoek's ideas were close to that towering international figure of left-wing socialism, Rosa Luxemburg. While adhering to the prevailing view that Socialist participation in electoralism and trade unionism was necessary to spread revolutionary ideas among the masses and to conduct struggles in their immediate interests, he insisted that the critical social questions of the day also required mass actions. In an article written for the *New Review* he argued that:

Spontaneous outbreaks from among the masses revealed possibilities of new methods of working class warfare, other than parliamentarism and trade unionism. They showed the weapon at the disposal of the proletariat against imperialism, *mass actions*, in which the working masses demonstrate their opposition on the streets or seek to impose their will upon governments by means of the political general strike.³

After 1909, Pannekoek advocated a strategy of "war against war" as the appropriate proletarian response to the obvious preparations by all capitalist governments. Together with Lenin

and Luxemburg he became a forceful spokesman against tendencies within socialist ranks to support national governments or, alternatively, to take a pacifist position toward war preparation.

But, unlike Lenin, who viewed the growing propensity of some Socialists to support the war aims of their governments as being caused by the sharing of imperialist superprofits by a narrow layer of workers, Pannekoek explained the reformism of a large wing of the workers' movement in terms reminiscent of the sociology of Robert Michels and Max Weber. (The significance of this difference was to become clear in the ensuing years.)

Although war preparations by capitalist governments had led to resistance by a section of the workers,

the elements of weakness also became more apparent. The rapid growth of the party and the labor union organizations has produced an army of parliamentarians, functionaries and officials who, as sort of specialists, became the representatives of traditional methods of warfare and obstructed the adoption of new methods. As Social Democracy grew in parliamentary strength the tendency to join hands with portions of the capitalist class for the purpose of winning reforms became more marked.⁴

Yet organization is "a condition, a necessary instrument for the victory of the proletariat."⁵ Despite the fact that organizational maintenance comes to be regarded "as an end, instead of as a means to an end," Pannekoek saw the party and its parliamentary functions as necessary, since the object of the proletarian struggle was to win state power. The parliamentary struggle helped to "build up proletarian power" since the revolution is not a single act but a many-sided struggle in a long historical process.

The ambiguity between the sociological critique of the party and the political need for it began to clear up in 1915 when, having pronounced the Second International dead owing to its inability to oppose the war, Pannekoek advocated a single revolutionary tactic to stay the hand of the belligerent governments—the mass political strike. In an article in the *New Review* in February 1915, Pannekoek spelled out his theory of revolutionary process, which reflected his view of social change and to which he held consistently in later years.

According to Pannekoek, "The proletarian revolution . . . will also be a long historical process . . . This process divides naturally into a number of individual revolutionary actions,

which alternate with periods of quiet, of peaceful organization and even periodic collapse.”⁶ Class consciousness is not a prerequisite for revolutionary action. Struggle by the masses for important reforms strengthens their organization and their consciousness, provided it is undertaken by themselves directly. “Capitalist rule cannot be destroyed at one blow,” Pannekoek maintained; “it will take a series of struggles.”⁷

Although not explicitly abandoning parliamentary and trade union organization, Pannekoek leaned toward reliance on mass action even to advance reforms or to stop the war. He stressed that “mass actions are the revolutionary method of the modern proletariat.”⁸ In the course of directing its own struggle the proletariat acquires the strength and understanding to cause capitalist rule to crumble. Socialist consciousness does not come about abstractly, it can only emerge in the process of struggle.

The Russian Revolution convinced many left-wing socialists that the war would produce the immediate conditions for revolution in Western Europe. Pannekoek and Gorter were among the most enthusiastic advocates of the foundation of a Third International. Lenin’s moral authority made his demand for a new International a serious proposal, which all socialists had to consider. But the political weight of the Bolsheviks was not based only on their early critique of the politics of the Second International, or even upon their leadership of the November Revolution. The epochal significance of the Russian Revolution was, from the point of view of left militants, the creation of workers’ councils. Gorter’s position was typical:

The light of the new world radiates from the workers councils. The working class of the world found in these workers councils its organization and its centralization the form and expression for the revolution and for socialist society.⁹

Pannekoek saw the workers councils as the dictatorship of the proletariat. They were both means and ends for the working class in its conquest of power. The capitalist state must be smashed and replaced, not by a new workers state, but by a federation of workers councils controlled by the workers. As Gorter argued, power would flow from below, even though centralization of production and distribution were necessary. “The World Proletariat” he declared, “must erect workers councils, councils of

the locality, of the provinces and districts, of the empires or nations, as a means to the revolution and as the new form of society."

The Bolsheviks, following the ideas of Lenin's famous pamphlet *What Is to Be Done?*,¹⁰ had created a steeled cadre of professional revolutionaries who, while linked to the masses, were accountable only to themselves and the truths of Marxist science. The autonomy of the workers movement was impermissible for the Bolsheviks since, according to them, the workers could never achieve revolutionary understanding without the active intervention of the party. Although he was theoretically rigid on this point, Lenin's genius consisted in enormous tactical flexibility. He quickly understood the value of the workers councils as an organized base for the revolutionary thrust. The task of the Bolsheviks was to capture leadership of the councils. But Lenin was not entirely convinced that the councils were the necessary form of proletarian social and political power. Nor did he see the councils as replacing the capitalist state, except in the revolutionary period. The workers state in Russia, although formally consisting of the federation of workers' councils, was in reality to be a new organ of power connected to the party. It developed a bureaucracy of its own, a professional standing army, and it assumed full control of the economy. In 1918, in the midst of economic and social crisis, the substantive functions of the soviets were suspended even where the legal forms remained.

The exhaustion of revolutionary energy following the defeat of the German and Hungarian revolutions, the abortive factory uprisings and mass strikes in Italy, and the stabilization of capitalist regimes throughout Western Europe, transformed the Third International into a movement supporting the Russian Revolution and assisting the consolidation of the fledgling Communist Parties, which were to be viable organizations for political opposition within the framework of capitalist society. In effect, the revolution was on the run. The twenties saw the transformation of revolutionary communism into parliamentary communism. The objective convergence of Communist and Socialist parties in function, if not ideology, ushered in a new tactic in the arsenal of Communist politics: the united front.

The united front was a defensive strategy designed to put the relatively isolated Communists into closer contact with Socialist workers, trade unions, and popular organizations of all types. Another objective was to win the support of Socialists outside

the Third International for Soviet survival. Communists hoped to convince Socialists that it was to their interest to stay the hands of capitalist governments seeking soviet destruction since their real objective was to weaken if not to destroy the workers' movement.

The most pervasive critique of Bolshevik theory and practice came from the Council Communists. Before examining their position, it should be noted that their departure from the views of Lenin was anticipated in the earlier debates between Lenin and his two chief theoretical and political adversaries during the formation of the Bolshevik wing of the Russian Social Democratic movement in the first four years of the twentieth century. Both Rosa Luxemburg and the Russian "economist" group were sharply critical of Lenin's view that the Party ought to consist of a small band of dedicated professional revolutionaries whose mission was to direct the spontaneous rebellion of the workers.

Rosa Luxemburg's attack against Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?*¹¹ was directed against his separation of the party from the masses.¹¹ "Social Democracy is not joined to the proletariat" as Lenin maintained. "It is itself the proletariat . . . the party is the 'self-centralism' of the most advanced sector of the proletariat" who must be educated in the political struggle and exercise "direct influence on public life" unmediated by an elite vanguard. Against the Leninist idea that the party is the general staff of the proletariat, Luxemburg stated flatly: "Revolutions cannot be made at command. Nor is this the task of the party. Our duty is only at all times to speak out plainly without fear or trembling; to hold out before the masses their tasks in the given historical moment." The objective of the educational role of the party is the "abolition of the relations between the leaders and the led in the bourgeois sense of the word."¹²

The so-called "economist group" of the Russian Social Democratic Party developed its own position in the work of an important member, Vladimir Akimov. Lenin's attack on the economists has received much more attention than the actual views of his adversaries, since the group Akimov spoke for was clearly a minority within the party and was isolated from the various warring factions. Yet, Lenin understood that the political influence of the economists did not depend on voting strength at the party congresses. The economists represented a theoretical link to the left-wing of the International movement and were closer to Marx

in their conception of socialist struggle than was Lenin. To Lenin's statement that "The history of all countries shows that, by its own efforts alone, the working class is able to develop only trade union consciousness,"¹³ Akimov replied:

Socialism itself is only the theoretical expression of the movement of the proletariat. . . . He [Lenin] does not see the movement and activity of the "revolutionary class" as spontaneous, as creative, as capable of forming the organs, the organizations, it requires. On the contrary, he sees them as the response to, the echo of, the seething activity of the organization of revolutions.¹⁴

According to Akimov the party is an agitational force that seeks not to replace the self-activity of the proletariat, but to assist it. Anticipating the work of the Council Communists, Akimov asserted: "I want our programme to state that as the contradictions inherent in bourgeois society grow there is also an increase in the conscious revolutionary class struggle."¹⁵

While paying tribute to Lenin's revival of the revolutionary project as an imminent task, the Council Communists' criticism demonstrates the continuity of the theory and politics of the Second and the Third Internationals by looking at their views of class consciousness. There is a remarkable congruence in Lenin's assertion that socialism is brought to the proletariat "from the outside," by bourgeois intelligentsia, and the statement by Karl Kautsky that "It is absolutely untrue that socialist consciousness is a necessary and direct product of the proletarian class struggle" and that "they arise side by side, not only out of the other; . . . Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. And the vehicle of science is not the proletariat but the bourgeois intelligentsia."¹⁶ (Later, Pannekoek undertook a detailed critique of Lenin's theoretical views in his significant *Lenin as Philosopher*, translated into English in 1948.)

According to the Council Communists' concept of the development of class consciousness, the proletariat develops the awareness that its interests are those of the whole society through the experience of its own exploitation and its struggles to overcome it. Capitalism requires that a huge number of workers be socialized into concentrated geographic and industrial situations, and it is the factory itself that organizes the elementary sense of solidarity of workers sharing the same condition. Their resistance

to oppressive working conditions and their own powerlessness first manifests itself in combinations of workers seeking redress of grievances. Since "there cannot be any doubt that an unlimited expansion of capitalism offering lasting life possibilities for the population is excluded by its inner character" and "workers revolution cannot flourish in prosperity,"¹⁷ revolutionary conditions were seen to mature in capitalist crises. It is the combination of objective conditions producing economic and social crisis and the experience gained by workers resisting attempts to transfer the burden of the crisis on to their backs that produces the possibility of workers revolution. Contrary to those who insisted on the existence of a strong revolutionary party enjoying the confidence of the masses and able to "divert the proletariat from its economist path" (Lenin), Pannekoek stated flatly: "The insight needed cannot be obtained as instruction of an ignorant mass by learned teachers, possessors of science. . . . It can only be acquired by self-education, strenuous self-activity."¹⁸

Pannekoek warned against the "one sided teaching of doctrines" that "can only serve to breed obedient followers." If the working masses themselves are not transformed by their own efforts, no social transformation can take place. Thus, his later analysis of the outcome of the Bolshevik seizure of power was that "the workers are no more masters of the means of production [in the Soviet Union] than in Western capitalism. They receive wages and are exploited by the state as the only mammoth capitalist."¹⁹ The Soviet system is state socialism. The Communist Party did not intend to liberate the workers, but only to make them its obedient followers.

After 1925 the Trotskyists began to criticize the Stalin regime for its departure from Leninist principles. The Council Communists disagreed, seeing a continuum. They argued that Bolshevism had "solved the historical problems of the bourgeois revolution in feudal capitalist Russia with the aid of the proletariat as the active, fighting instrument. . . . Marxism-Leninism is not Marxism, but a filling of the Marxist terminology adapted to the needs of the bourgeois revolution in Russia." The Bolsheviks were seen as a "revolutionary, petit bourgeois and jacobinical intelligentsia"²⁰ that transformed the proletariat into an object, rather than the subject, of the revolutionary process. They reduced the workers to instruments of the Communist Party, justifying this by their theory of the party.

Before turning to Lenin's attack on the Council Communists

in *Left-Wing Communism*, it is interesting to look at Trotsky's views on the question of leadership in 1920. The second most prominent Bolshevik echoed precisely Lenin's views on the supremacy of the party:

The problem of "leaders and masses" has no independent existence. By extending the scope of its ideological influence, by penetrating into all fields of proletarian life and struggle, by drawing ever broader laboring masses into active struggle under the banner of the revolution, the Communist Party thereby extends and deepens the self-action of the masses.²¹

Today we have received a proposal from the Polish government to conclude peace. Who decides such questions? We have the Council of Peoples Commissars, but it too must be subject to certain control. Whose control? The control of the working class as a formless chaotic mass? No. The central committee of the Communist Party is convened in order to discuss the proposal and to decide whether it ought to be answered. And when we have to conduct wars, organize new divisions, and find the best elements for them—where do we turn? We turn to the party, to the central committee.²²

According to Bolshevism the party is presumed to be the near perfect representative of proletarian interests. Self-activity means that activity inspired and directed by the party. If left to itself, the working class is chaotic. Without control from above no affairs of state can be transacted.

The argument on the other critical issues raised by Lenin proceeds, not from the "lefts" questioning the nobility of the revolution itself nor the efficacy of Bolshevik tactics in response to Russian conditions, but from the attempt to *transform expediency into doctrine*. Only later, in the 1930's, did the Council Communists make their comprehensive critique of Party Marxism in general and Bolshevism in particular. Taking their cue from the works of Marx himself, they argued that the distinguishing feature of the proletariat is its capacity for self-organization and self-management owing to the conditions of capitalist production that require a highly educated and trained labor force concentrated into huge social units of production. For Marx, the proletariat is the first exploited class in human history capable of becoming, through the struggle for its own emancipation, the subject of historical change. The fundamental character of the labor

process under capitalism, the close cooperation of masses of laborers, provides the conditions for the development of their social consciousness. "Not only have we here an increase in the productive power of the individual by means of cooperation, but the creation of a new power, namely, the collective power of the masses. . . ." This collective power is not their own act, but the "act of capital that brings and keeps them together."²³

The strength of capital is precisely its weakness. It brings into being masses of workers, formerly isolated peasants or marginal workers, who discover, through cooperation, the conditions for their own liberation within the production process.

The turn away from the self-activity of the masses as the substance of revolutionary transformation under capitalism is not based only on the conditions of backward Russia and other underdeveloped areas, although this is a critical element in the Leninist revision. The most sophisticated argument for this position is that of Georg Lukács who argued that its roots are found in Marx's own concept of "fetishism." Lukács rediscovered and reinterpreted this fetishizing of the production process as reification. The central idea here is that the cooperation of workers and their mutual aid and struggle to ameliorate exploitation and eventually overcome it has its "counteracting causes." As the worker creates his world through the process of the production of commodities, he "forgets" that he has created his external environment, that the state and all other institutions of society are merely forms of his alienated labor. The world acquires objectivity as if it were created independently of his will and activity. The objective social world now appears as alien to the worker, standing over and above him as domination. He cannot recapture the world through his own efforts because he cannot know it. According to Lukács, the working class represents the objective negation of capitalism because of its position in the production process. Although class consciousness is, in the last analysis, the result of the alienation of labor in the course of producing commodities, the mediations of commodity production and alienated labor prevent the working class from totalizing its own experience except through the activity of the revolutionary party. The revolutionary party breaks the power of reification and restores to the proletariat its own capacity for self-consciousness.

Written in 1920, *Left-Wing Communism* is Lenin's attack on the Council Communists, then at the zenith of their influence.

For Lenin the polemic against the “lefts” served several purposes: first, as in the earlier debate with the economists, they represented the most consistent alternative to Bolshevism in the post-revolutionary period. Second, the pamphlet served to signal the turn of the international movement away from insurrectionary perspectives and toward a strategy of retreat and consolidation. Even though the concept of “socialism in one country” (later to be ensconced as official Communist doctrine by Stalin) was still abhorrent to the Bolsheviks, the practical message to the forces of the Third International was to yield all but the revolutionary rhetoric, and place all energies at the service of the feeble Soviet state.

Since the Party was the repository of class consciousness and political wisdom, Lenin argued in *Left-Wing Communism* for participation by Communists in trade unions and bourgeois parliaments in order to develop a party “enjoying the confidence of all that is honest in a given class.” It does not matter that the trade unions are reactionary. “To refuse to work in the reactionary trade unions means leaving the insufficiently developed or backward masses of the workers under the influence of the reactionary leaders.”²⁴ Since the “art of politics (and the Communist’s correct understanding of his tasks) lies in correctly gauging conditions and the moment when the vanguard of the proletariat can successfully seize power,”²⁵ the Party must use all methods that bring it in contact with the mass of workers and peasants to extend its influence over them “precisely for the purpose of enlightening and awakening the undeveloped downtrodden ignorant peasant masses” and workers. “As long as you are unable to disperse parliament and every other type of reactionary institution you must work inside them.”²⁶

By 1920, the Bolsheviks were prepared to assert that “experience has proved that on some very important questions concerning the proletarian revolution all countries will *inevitably* have to go through what Russia has gone through.”²⁷ Among these “absolute centralization and the strictest discipline of the proletariat are one of the fundamental conditions for victory over the bourgeoisie.”²⁸

In his *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin*, Gorter disputed the attempt to draw lessons on the basis of the Russian experience for movements in advanced capitalist countries. Gorter’s exposition of the differences rests on the main arguments derived from

his earlier work, *World Revolution*. Unlike Russia where the working class was weak in comparison to the peasantry, the exact opposite is the case in the advanced countries. The working class' centrality to the process of production, its capacity for self-organization, and the reactionary character of the petit-bourgeois peasantry imply that even if the tactic of the alliance between the two classes was valid in Russia, the working class must "stand alone" in the advanced capitalist countries in its struggle. Moreover, under conditions of long working-class struggles and self-organization, the "importance of the masses is relatively greater, the importance of leaders relatively less" than in Russia.²⁹

Clearly, Lenin was devising a strategy appropriate to the conditions of political struggle engaged in by the parties of the Second International during the formative period of workers' organization. Gorter replied flatly: "the trade unions are not a good weapon for the European revolution! . . . [They] are slow moving complicated instruments good only for the evolutionary period."³⁰ Moreover, they are not adapted to the new historical phase:

The old forms of organization, the trade unions and political party, and the new forms of councils (soviets) belong to different phases in the development of society and have different functions. The first has to secure the position of the working class among other classes within capitalism and belongs to the period of expanding capitalism. The latter has to conquer complete dominance for the workers, to destroy capitalism and its class divisions, and belongs to the period of declining capitalism.³¹

Later, Pannekoek argued that the trade unions were perfect instruments of "monopoly capital's domination over the working class,"³² not only by virtue of their role as purveyors of labor power along craft and industrial lines, but also because their hierachial organization and division of labor between officers and members restricted the direct action of the workers themselves and their control over all decisions affecting their lives. Only the creation of factory committees, workers' councils, and other self-directed organizations could insure the development of workers' power and eventual hegemony over society. According to the Council Communists the critical struggle within the workers' movement was precisely to break from the "organizational forms of trade union and political party" that were "useless in

the revolutionary class fight.” Since “leaders cannot make revolutions” the workers require “new forms of organization in which they keep the power of action in their own hands.”³³

Gorter in his reply to Lenin also deals with the arguments advanced for participation by socialists in bourgeois parliaments. To the claim that revolutionaries can use parliamentary politics to educate proletarian and petit-bourgeois elements to their ideas, Gorter retorted that the mass media do not “report our parliamentary speeches. The speeches are mostly distorted. We therefore do not reach them with parliamentary speeches . . . We reach them particularly through actions. In all larger cities they see us act: our strikes, our street fights, our councils. They hear our slogans. They see us go forward.”³⁴

Gorter also attempts to refute Lenin’s assertion that the participation of revolutionaries in parliament is necessary to provoke splits in the bourgeois parties and classes. Gorter invokes the unity of the capitalist and other ruling classes in the period of monopoly capitalism on all critical issues such as “war and imperialism”; moreover, “because the question of the workers dominates everything they are united on all questions.” Although acknowledging that all other classes are not identical in their interests, more than ever they are “joined with big capital.”³⁵

The Council Communists accused the Bolsheviks of imposing institutions, which, during the period of the crisis of the capitalist system, only prevent the workers from fulfilling their objectives. “The belief in parties is the main reason for the impotence of the working class.” Pannekoek wrote later that “we avoid forming a new party not because we are too few, but because a party is an organization that aims to lead and control the working class.”³⁶ The party, in the Council Communist’s view, was “one of the heaviest and most dangerous impediments” in the way of revolution.³⁷

Eclipsed in political influence, if not in theoretical insight, the Council Communists turned strongly against the Bolshevik position which was under the influence of Stalinist developments and the concurrent deterioration of the politics of the International during the rise of fascism. For them, “the struggle against Bolshevik ideology, against Bolshevik practices and hence against all groups seeking to anchor them anew in the proletariat is one of the first tasks in the struggle for the revolutionary reorientation of the working class.”³⁸

III

Perhaps the most startling of the polemics directed at the Bolsheviks was the statement that "The rule of the bolshevist commissar finds its logical conclusion in fascistic dictatorships spread all over the globe." The hegemony of the Bolsheviks among the international workers' movements, they asserted, was based on the subordination of the workers to Party rule, the subordination of the revolutionary impulses of the workers in advanced capitalist countries to the (bourgeois) requirements of the soviet state and Party bureaucracies. Bolshevism had become a counter-revolutionary instrument. Its use of Marxist phraseology represented the recognition by the leaders of the Communist Party of the persistence of revolutionary enthusiasm and rebellious impulses among the workers. The Russian Party bureaucrats and their dependent parties in the West prevented the workers from "developing into a growing proletarian power, and wasted them in worthless adventures."³⁹ Parliamentary opportunism masked as the United Front Against Fascism diverted workers from developing their autonomous power in the wake of the capitalist crisis and "this activity of the Communist party prepared the way for Fascism (in Italy and Germany)."⁴⁰

The objective of the Bolsheviks was seen as the displacement of the Western bourgeoisie from the outside—and their own installation as a new ruling class. This determined their outlook on political and social struggles during the era of rising Fascism. For the Council Communists there was no question of Bolshevik opposition to fascism. Though the Fascists had laid particular stress upon the suppression of Communist organizations and influence among the workers, Fascist and Bolshevik demagogies were seen to differ little from each other. Each employed revolutionary phraseology to dominate the workers. Each exploited class antagonisms for authoritarian ends.

It was argued that the Bolsheviks, though now furiously opposed by the Fascists had, nevertheless, prepared the workers for Fascist rule. Both of these movements exalted the party and its leadership. The example of Germany was particularly instructive. The victory of fascism, seen by the Communists as the triumph of the big bourgeoisie, based on the support of the petit-bourgeois masses, was understood by Pannekoek and Korsch as

internally connected to the pattern of bureaucratic socialism within the workers' movement itself. No articulate socialist force with roots among the masses advocated workers' councils, the repudiation of trade unions, and the development of autonomous movements of workers' direct action to meet their elementary economic and social needs. Instead, the leaders of the Socialist and Communist Parties denounced the wildcat strikes in the early 1930s as anarchistic, imposed strict discipline over their members, and engaged in endless parliamentary maneuvers.

By the mid-1930s the Council Communists in Germany were all exiled to the United States. Bereft of political influence among the American workers, their publications during this period remain examples of clear and powerful criticism, not only of the prevailing currents within the workers' movement, but of Marxist theory as well. Among the most notable of those who found themselves exiled from European soil after the triumph of Nazism was Karl Korsch. Believing that the "authentic Marx" understood that the transition to socialism could only be accomplished by the self-conscious activity of the proletariat, Korsch had, nevertheless, retained the belief that the revolutionary party was a necessary tool in the proletariat's revolutionary arsenal. The party was the means by which the proletariat realized the workers' councils. But Korsch understood the party very much as had Luxemburg and Akimov: the proletariat was the party.

Along with Pannekoek and Gorter, Korsch increasingly addressed himself to the problems of Marxist theory. As early as his *Marxism and Philosophy* (1923) Korsch had insisted that theory must be forged historically, in the course of the working class' own struggle for emancipation. Thus, the work of Marx, corresponding to a particular period in the development of capitalism and the proletariat's struggle against it, could only be provisionally useful to any other period. Korsch accepted the general analysis of capitalism provided by Marx and Engels, since the fundamental bases of the socio-economic system remained in force. But "Marxism is not positive, but critical"; it is not an eternal science, it does not provide us with knowledge true for all periods. The principle of specificity is an essential feature of Korsch's Marxism. For Korsch, the materialist dialectic provides an approach for the understanding and critique of contemporary reality, and nothing more. Its central proposition is "the specific relation of all economic terms and propositions to historically determined objects."

This stress on "critique," which Korsch shares with Marx, is perhaps the only sense in which the later Korsch and his associates can be called "Marxist." This critical tendency of Marxism frees it from dogma. Toward the end of his life, Korsch undertook the outlines of a critique of the Marxian theory itself (in his book, *Karl Marx*, and in a series of articles). Korsch insisted that working-class practice is the criterion of social truth. Those who relied on the activity of a vanguard to lead the workers to their liberation could not propose criteria that related internally to the workers' need. The scientism of both the theorists of the Second and Third Internationals is an outgrowth of their practice, on one hand, and the failure of the workers to take possession of their own movement, on the other.

The tradition of Marxist theory that finds its inspiration in Marx's own emphasis on the primacy of the active relationship of theory and practice, where practice is not only the criterion of truth but its origin, found a relentless disciple in Korsch. True to his method, Korsch undertook an examination of the propositions of Marxist theory in the light of the development of capitalism and the workers' movement that attempts to transform it. Korsch finds Marxism ossified in the conditions appropriate to capitalism's stage of development in the nineteenth century. Some of the emphases of the later Marx, particularly his concentration on the problem of the seizure of state power and the two-phase theory of socialism, according to which the state must remain a repressive organ of workers' power until the economic basis for communism has been laid and the enemies of the workers power have been overcome, were seen by Korsch as useful to underdeveloped countries embarking on the revolutionary road. Like Gorter and Pannekoek, however, he argued for the need to reexamine these theses in the light of the advanced capitalist societies.⁴¹

For the Council Communists, the failure of working-class practice in no way invalidates their belief that the proletariat's self-activity is the fundamental condition for revolutionary change. Yet in the wake of the decline of the revolutionary workers' movement, Council Communist theory itself took an abstract form. The scientific tone of much of the writing of Korsch and Pannekoek from the 1930s to their deaths in the early 1960s reflected their separation from a workers' movement capable of fulfilling their prognosis of revolution.

After World War II the driving force behind the group of

Council Communists in the United States, Paul Mattick, abandoned practical political activity. The ill-fated United Workers Party had been, in the 1930s, a loose collection of workers who participated in social struggles in the workplace. But the movement was largely propagandistic. *Living Marxism* provided a vehicle for its views, but it in no way became the organ of any section of the workers' movement. For a time Korsch was associated with the group of émigrés from the Frankfurt school who found temporary shelter at Columbia University, but the collaboration bore little fruit.

After the war, Mattick confined his writing, in all except a few appreciations of Pannekoek and the workers' councils, to problems of economic theory, publishing his *Marx and Keynes* in 1969. Pannekoek himself wrote his major work, *Workers Councils*, during the war. The first two chapters of the book are a systematic exposition of all the ideas found in other places during the course of the previous twenty years of theoretical work. One of the important new features of the book is its attempt to outline the actual functions of the councils.

The Council Communists' continual stress on the reactionary function of the party and trade unions blinded them to other explanations of the failure of the working-class movement. Pannekoek and Mattick saw that the venality of the parties and unions was a function of the transformation of capitalism to state capitalism, whose monopoly features and integration of the state into the operation of the economy demand a disciplined labor force. They recognized that this discipline is provided by the labor unions, whose internal structure mirrors corporate capitalist organization. But they did not explain the lived experience of the working class that permits this process.

By comparison, Wilhelm Reich distinguishes between the class consciousness of the "leadership" and that of the "masses." The masses are not interested in global events except insofar as they affect daily life, that is, the problems of food, clothing, shelter, relations with family and neighbors and "opportunities for sexual satisfaction in the narrow sense."⁴² According to Reich the "existence of men and its determinations overlay and are reproduced in their psychic structure, to which they give form. Only through this psychic structure is the objective process accessible and capable of being modified."⁴³ Therefore, the awakening of class consciousness must be related to daily life. Reich introduces the

concept of adolescent rebellion against authoritarian repression, against parents, whose role is analogous to the executive organs of state authority. It is this rebellion which usually is the essential motive pushing young people toward the left. "It is always connected to a more or less conscious and strong need for sexual fulfillment."⁴⁴ The elementary forms of class consciousness develop or are repressed on the microsocial level, that is, in the course of everyday life. The workplace is a vital part of that everyday life, but only becomes crucial as a determinant of psychic structure relatively late in a person's life. Propaganda and other education cannot be confined to purely political appeals or to a discussion of alienated labor in the narrow sense. The formation of consciousness is more a function of the struggle for the fulfillment of daily needs and against the most personal forms of repression than a response to issues raised on the macrosocial and political level. Such questions as the sexual revolution—indeed all problems of human relations—must be addressed by the revolutionary movement.

During the late twenties and early thirties Reich worked within the framework of Party Marxism. Nevertheless, the *Mass Psychology of Fascism* and his pamphlet of the same year *What Is Class Consciousness?* introduce the dimension of the struggles of daily life as fundamental determinants of class consciousness. The struggle for workers' control over production addresses not only the question of ameliorating grievances but represents a "coming to consciousness" of the workers so that they can create new forms of social life. They must from now on begin to organize their own lives in all areas. Whereas the Council Communists treated the working class without differentiation based on such factors as sex or age, Reich placed his hopes on women and youth because these groups faced repression in all areas of their lives and could not easily subjugate their repression. Class consciousness for Reich was:

1. knowledge of one's fundamental needs in all domains;
2. knowledge of the means and opportunities for satisfying them;
3. an understanding that the system of private enterprise constitutes the chief obstacle to the satisfaction of needs, but that "one's own inhibitions and anxieties . . . get in the way of a clear view of the necessities of one's own life and the obstacles thereto" and that the working class is invincible if it is unified into a mass movement.⁴⁵

The women and youth have the best chance to identify their own needs and connect them to the need to take power in the social system.

Reich shared the view of the Council Communists that the Bolsheviks had prepared the ground for the victory of fascism. The failure of the Communists to deal with the authoritarianism of working-class psychic structure, arising from sexual repression in the family, assured the victory of fascism. Moreover, Reich understood that the Communist Party and the trade unions mirrored the authoritarian relations of bourgeois society, thereby reinforcing these aspects of working-class life. He believed that the revolutionary movement would have had to create and support organizations and a culture directed against these totalitarian human relations. His critique of the practice of the pre-Nazi Left was addressed to its refusal to address the revolution in human relations until the political revolutions against capitalist society had taken place.

The Council Communists, especially Korsch, were critical of the attempt to mix Freud and Marx. The conjuncture of social forces, particularly the crisis of capitalism during its decline, and the degree of organization and self-direction among the masses themselves, were the twin variables that could produce radical changes in social consciousness. It is idealism, they argued, to separate the development of consciousness from the spontaneous, direct action of the proletariat, which in turn, can only arise at the point of the production of material life where the objective conditions for solidarity exist. Not that the Council Communists denied the importance of family and educational institutions for the conditioning of class consciousness. The role of direct action was precisely to unleash the creative energies of the proletariat who could only overcome their "inhibitions and anxieties" in the course of creating their own organizations of struggle. Addressing the problem of the failure of the working class in 1949, Pannekoek attributed the inability of the workers to successfully resist the rise of fascism and to make their own revolution to their acceptance of the narrow aims of the leading Socialist parties in Europe. The Socialists advocated the conquest of political power by the working class through its party instrument and then the "organization of production into a state-directed planned economic system." The workers would change one set of masters for another but they would not necessarily achieve full liberation. Pannekoek finds the orthodox Socialist vision bureaucratic, leav-

ing the working class dominated and unfree. But, for the Council Communists there is no tactical approach to convincing the working class to take direction of society and to fashion its own aims of controlling production and social life without the mediations of political and trade union bureaucracies. The breakthrough can only occur through the mechanism of the spontaneous revolt.

These differences notwithstanding, Reich and the Council Communists provide complementary ways to understand the necessities of the struggle. Both emphasized the importance of conducting the struggle for liberation and against the socio-economic system through the masses' self-direction of their own organizations. Reich understands workers councils to be the necessary, but not the sufficient, condition for revolutionary action. For Reich, the sufficient condition is the conscious efforts of the masses to overcome repressed sexuality and the repressive conditions of all aspects of everyday life.

The 1960s witnessed the revival of some of the underlying themes of Council Communism. The emergence of a New Left in western Europe and the United States was related to the Pandora's box opened by the 1956 Nikita Khrushchev speech. More important was the emergence of a new radical movement whose inspiration was the attempt of youth and women to free themselves from repressive social relations of capitalist institutions. The spontaneity of the 1968 May revolt in France represents some vindication of the revolutionary path of the Council Communists. Workers and students did attempt to place control of social life in their own hands. The parties of the Left and the trade unions that had held the working class in chains during postwar years were found on the other side of the barricades. The small Trotskyist and Maoist organizations, no more than tendencies within the working-class and student movements, chose to be carried with the tide of school and factory occupations decided upon by the masses participating in them. Some critics of spontaneity attribute the success of the government, aided by the Communist Party, in crushing the revolt to the failure of the class to fashion a powerful party. Others, particularly those who accept the fundamental theses of Council Communism, such as *Informations Correspondance Ouvrière* (ICO), argue that "there was no victory, but no defeat either." True to the position of Pannekoek, the ICO group greeted the revolt as a part of the slow process of maturation needed for final victory over capitalism. The workers' councils will be the directing instrument

of the workers' own revolution. The course of the May revolt could not have been reversed by reproducing forms of organization which themselves constituted the obstacle to victory.

Conclusion

In September 1879 Marx and Engels addressed a letter to the leaders of the German Social Democratic Party. The letter is an example for those who followed the line of thought made explicit by Marx himself:

As for ourselves, in view of our past there is only one road open to us. For almost forty years we have stressed the class struggle as the immediate driving power of history, and in particular the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as the great lever of the modern social revolution; . . . When the International was formed we expressly formulated the battle cry: The emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working classes themselves. We cannot therefore cooperate with people who openly state that the workers are too uneducated to emancipate themselves and must be freed from above by philanthropic big bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie.⁴⁷

Marx and Engels always insisted that the socialist movement must be working class. They made plain their general antipathy to the entrance of persons from other classes and strata into the movement, especially those who wished to give it either an elitist or a populist stamp. Their view of the anarchists as elitists and as nonproletarian elements who sought influence in the workers' movement remained among their chief criticisms.

On the other hand, Marx and Engels both made it clear that the seizure of power by the proletariat could not be accomplished without the capture of the repressive functions of the state, at least in the transitional period during which the proletariat attempts to consolidate its power. In his letter to August Bebel (March 18–28, 1875), Engels endorses both the idea that "with the introduction of the socialist order of society the state will dissolve of itself and disappear," and the idea that the proletariat will have to use the state not "in the interests of freedom but in order to hold down its adversaries, and as soon as it becomes possible to speak of freedom the state as such ceases to exist."⁴⁷

It is evident that Pannekoek and the Council Communists were direct descendants of the Marxian view of the proletariat as self-emancipatory while marrying this concept to the anarchosyndicalist idea that the struggle for socialism could bypass the transitional state. Indeed, for them the party and the trade unions had become obstacles to the development of class consciousness by the First World War, since the working class only became aware of its real interests in the process of self-emancipation through organizing the struggles for its immediate needs. In the end, the revolutionary situation was the conjuncture of the manifest crisis of the system with a degree of autonomous proletarian self-organization.

In opposing Lenin and the politics of the Third International, the Council Communists were opposing the voluntarist tendency in the Socialist and Communist movements originating with the Jacobins of the French Revolution and the anarchists of the First International. In Leninist theory "objective conditions" played their role in determining the revolutionary potential (the famous general crisis of capitalism in the epoch of imperialism). But for Lenin, the subject of history is not the proletariat; it is the vanguard party. The Leninists believed that the proletariat by its own devices could never achieve its own emancipation except through the active leadership of the conscious revolutionary party. In the last instance, it is the party and not the class that is charged with the responsibility of leading the revolution. Lenin accepted Engels' notion that socialist society implied the end of hierarchical state relations. There is evidence that he regarded the Bolsheviks as custodians of the workers' own power. But the advance to socialism seemed to demand the repression of all enemies of the new socialist state and the development of the productive forces. Indeed, the backward workers and peasants had to be brought into advanced industrial society before the ideas of workers' control could be realized.

Socialist consciousness was no a priori category for the Council Communists. It could only be the product not the cause of revolutionary actions, actions which objectively challenge bourgeois power. The "long historical process" thesis enunciated by Pannekoek was no gradualist doctrine. Unlike the parliamentary Socialists of the Second International and the parliamentary Communists of the Third, the Council Communists believed that revolution implied the more or less violent acquisition of power

by the workers. But this process could be no coup d'état if it was to have a socialist character. The seizure of state power by militant minorities, even those who acted in the name of the revolutionary working class, was, in reality, the action of the discontented bourgeois. To be sure, the Council Communists understood that Leninism comprehended itself as Marxism in the epoch of imperialism. According to their view, Leninism was a deformed version of Marxism used to co-opt the revolutionary working class and to divert it from its socialist path. The working class of Russia may have been the battering ram of the Jacobin seizure of power by the petit-bourgeois leaders of the Bolsheviks, but the mediations of the party and the state robbed the working class of its autonomy and thus prevented Russia from entering the high road to socialism.

Council communist theory has its defects. It fails to develop a theory of social institutions, that is, to understand the role of the family, education, the law and other elements of the superstructure that influence social struggle and working-class consciousness. The explanations of the failure of the working class in the period of capitalist crises and wars in the twentieth century relied almost entirely on the venality of Bolshevism as a world movement. Further, the concept of councils raises many unanswered questions. Indeed, Pannekoek's attempt to devise a detailed projection of how society would operate under council control in his *Workers Councils* seems overly schematic and simplistic. It does not anticipate, as Marx does in the *Grundrisse*, the changes in the forces of production that may alter or modify social organization. But there is no doubt that, by their consistent critique of revolutionary politics between the two world wars, they have left a rich legacy for those who wish to develop an undogmatic libertarian Marxism in the contemporary world.

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III

The Interregnum

8

The Marxism of Wilhelm Reich: The Social Function of Sexual Repression

Bertell Ollman

I

"Just as Marxism was sociologically the expression of man's becoming conscious of the laws of economics and the exploitation of a majority by a minority, so psychoanalysis is the expression of man becoming conscious of the social repression of sex."¹ How does sexual repression occur? What forms does it take? What are its effects on the individual? And, above all, what is its social function? Freud deserves credit for first raising these questions, but it is Wilhelm Reich who went furthest in supplying answers. In so doing, he not only developed Freud's own insights but immeasurably enriched both the theory and practice of Marxism.

Reich's writings fall into three main categories: (1) that of an analyst and co-worker of Freud's, (2) that of a Marxist, and (3) that of a natural scientist. In this essay I am only concerned with Reich the Marxist, though excursions into these other fields will occasionally be necessary since the division between them is often uncertain both in time and conception. Reich's Marxist period runs roughly from 1927, when he joined the Austrian

Social Democratic Party, to 1936, when he finally despaired of affecting the strategy of working-class movements. From 1930 to 1933 he was a member of the German Communist Party.

Marx had said, "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness."² This formula has been hotly attacked and defended, but seldom explored. Marxists have generally been content to elaborate on aspects of social existence and to assume a sooner or later, somehow or other, connection of such developments with the mental life of the people involved. Reich is one of the few who took this formula as an invitation to research. How does everyday life become transformed into ideology, into types and degrees of consciousness? What works for such transformation, what against? Where do these negative influences come from, and how do they exert their effect?

Reich believed that psychoanalysis has a role to play in answering these questions. Marxists, however, have always had a particularly strong aversion to Freud's science. On the practical level, psychoanalysis is carried on by rich doctors on richer patients. Conceptually, it starts out from the individual and his problems, and it tends to play down social conditions and constraints. It seems to say that early traumatic experiences, especially of a sexual nature, are responsible for unhappiness, and that individual solutions to such problems are possible. It also appears to view the individual's conscious state as being in some sense dependent on his unconscious mental life, making all rational explanation—including Marxism—so much rationalization. In short, in both its analysis and attempts at cure, psychoanalysis takes capitalist society for granted. As if this weren't enough to condemn it in the eyes of Marxists, psychoanalysis adds what seems to be a gratuitous insult in suggesting that Marxists in their great desire for radical change are neurotic.

Reich is not interested in defending psychoanalysis, particularly psychoanalysis as practiced, from such charges, and even adds to them by carefully restricting what Freud's science can and cannot do. As an investigation of individual mental processes, it cannot draw conclusions about social processes, either as to how they do or should operate; psychoanalysis is neither a sociology nor a system of ethics. To use psychoanalysis to explain social phenomena—as when S. Laforgue accounts for the existence of the police by reference to man's need for punishment—is an idealist deviation when it isn't simply nonsense.³ Similarly, Reich

declares, the belief widespread among analysts that the way to social betterment is through a "rational adjustment of human relations and by education toward a conscious control of instinctual life" is not logically derived from Freud's findings.⁴

Yet, for Reich, this list of shortcomings does not exhaust the possibilities of psychoanalysis. It is particularly in the effect of social phenomena on individuals that he believes psychoanalysis has something to teach Marxists. In concentrating on what it is about social conditions that produces ideas and attitudes, Marxists have ignored the process by which one gives rise to the other, by which the external situation is transformed into ideology. They also ignore the role played by irrational forces in keeping people from recognizing their interests. According to Reich, Freud's theories offer the means to correct such oversights.

II

Freud's science of psychoanalysis rests on three foundations: the libido theory, the theory of the unconscious, and the theory of the defense mechanisms of the conscious (each understood in light of existing repression). The different schools of psychoanalysis and, indeed, the different periods in Freud's own life are most readily distinguished by the degree of attention given to each of these foundations.

Of all Freud's followers, Reich is probably the foremost exponent of the libido theory, which holds that sexual excitement and fantasy are functions of a quantifiable sexual energy. Reich claims: "The basic structure of psychoanalytic theory is the theory of the instincts. Of this, the most solidly founded part is the theory of the libido—the doctrine of the dynamics of the sexual instinct."⁵ Even the theory of the unconscious, he believes, is a consequence of the libido theory.⁶

Paradoxically, Freud's great "discovery" was known to everybody but was never taken seriously on that account. Who hasn't experienced a buildup of sexual excitement? Who hasn't felt a sense of release of sexual tension? Who hasn't used "more" and "less" in connection with both? People have always discussed sex as if a type of energy were involved. Freud said there is, and, more significantly, gave it a name and function in his broader theory of the personality.

Freud's conception of instinctual activity focuses on libido

but takes in the aim, source, and object of such activity as well. The aim is to increase pleasure and avoid or reduce pain. The source is that part of the body where the tension or irritation is felt, and the object is that which is desired or whatever will relieve this tension. Before Freud, Reich says, instinct theory was in disarray, with as many instincts recognized as there are actions.⁷ However, the degree of order Freud brought to this situation is somewhat exaggerated. For example, Freud uses "sexual instinct" and "sexual instincts" interchangeably. The former is generally a synonym for libido, while the latter treats each source of libido (mouth, anus, genitals) and, on occasion, each class of objects as indicative of a separate instinct.⁸

Though Freud spoke of nonsexual instincts, such as the self-preservation or ego instincts and, later, the death instinct, only sexuality was explored in any detail. In this area, his main achievement lay in expanding the notion of sexuality to include all pleasure functions that are erotic in character and charting their progress from pregenital to genital forms. Reich, who accepted Freud's developmental map, was more consistent in linking such views to a single sexual instinct.

Marxists, as a rule, have been very uncomfortable with any theory of the instincts, because talk of instincts is often used to oppose sociological explanations of social phenomena and as a justification for leaving human nature as one finds it. The concept of instinct has also been attacked as but another name for the activities from which it is derived (since it is only in these activities that we observe it), and because what is said to be instinctual behavior differs so much from society to society.⁹ Such criticisms make a good case for caution, but they do not abolish the need for an instinct theory to explain the universality of the sexual drive. Admittedly, without the assumption of an existing sexual energy, instinct is just another name for observed sexual activity. This is the trap into which Freud, with his occasional talk of sexual instincts, and those of his followers who reject the libido theory fall. With the assumption of libido, on the other hand, different sexual activities become manifestations of one instinct that is something other than the forms it takes.

The chief importance of libido theory is that it serves as the central organizing principle in Freud's treatment of sexual repression and the resulting neuroses. The given is sexual energy that is forever pressing for release. Sometimes the pressure is

great, sometimes meager. Relations with parents, siblings, friends, teachers and others provide the objects and opportunities for gratification. They are also the instruments of social repression. Repression takes place in all the ways human beings fashion and enforce the command "don't." The immediate effects are a blocked libido and the creation of a repressive force, or conscience, within the individual himself. As pressure from the libido builds up, alternative means of gratification make their appearance. Generally these are permitted by the individual and his society only insofar as their real sexual character is disguised. When these alternative means of gratification make it difficult for the individual to function effectively or comfortably in his surroundings, they become symptoms of neurosis.

Freud distinguished between two kinds of neurosis, actual neurosis and psychoneurosis. The former includes anxiety neurosis and neurosthenia, and are attributed to current disturbances in one's sexual life. They are simply the immediate results of dammed-up sexuality. Psychoneurosis, on the other hand, such as hysteria and compulsion neurosis, have a psychic content, primarily the patient's fantasies and fears. To be sure, these ideas generally revolve around real or imagined sexual experiences, but their relation to the patient's present sexuality is unclear. Freud, whose clinical practice was almost entirely restricted to cases of psychoneurosis, suggested that every psychoneurosis has an "actual neurotic core," but he never made explicit what that is.

Reich does. He claims that the actual neurotic core Freud spoke of is dammed-up sexual energy, and that it provides the motor force in every psychoneurosis. The psychoneurosis retains its psychic content, but these ideas become troublesome only in the presence of sexual blockage or stasis. It follows that the inner conflict loses its strength when the sexual block is eliminated.¹⁰

The criticism most frequently leveled at Reich's account of neurosis is that many people who suffer from one or another psychoneurosis have a "healthy" sex life. Indeed, it was this observation that kept Freud from following up his own suggestion in the manner of Reich. Reich, too, was perplexed over the ability of people with severe sexual blockage to have erections and experience orgasm. He began to question his patients more closely about the quality of their sexual activity, and he discovered that none of them had great pleasure in the sexual act and that none of them experienced a complete release of tension in orgasm.

In none was there "as much as a trace of involuntary behavior or loss of alertness during the act."¹¹ Reich concluded that erectile and ejaculative potency (the only types then recognized by psychoanalysis) did not necessarily lead to orgasmic potency, which he defined as "the capacity of surrender to the flow of biological energy without any inhibition, the capacity for complete discharge of all dammed-up sexual excitation."¹² Only genital orgasm can discharge the full amount of sexual energy generated in the body, but without orgasmic potency a lot of this energy remains blocked and available for neuroses and other kinds of irrational behavior.

The barriers to orgasmic potency that Reich sees are of three sorts: psychic, physical, and social. Psychically, they lay in the patient's moralistic beliefs and neurotic fantasies and fears, in which considerable sexual energy is invested. Physically, they exist in the bodily attitudes, in the stiffness and awkwardness, assumed in self-repression in order to withstand energy breakthroughs. These psychic and physical restrictions interact, and they were incorporated by Reich into the notion of character structure (of which more later). Socially, the barriers to orgasmic potency are not only the repressive conditions that brought about the original stasis, but also the conditions that make it so difficult to achieve a satisfactory love life in the present. The most important of these are the institution of monogamous marriage and the double standard applied to premarital intercourse.

Freud never accepted Reich's orgasm theory as a proper extension to his own libido theory. As odd as this may seem, it appears that this was due at least in part to sexual prudery. Reich comments; "It is unbelievable but true that an exact analysis of genital behavior beyond such vague statements as 'I have slept with a man or a woman' were strictly taboo is psychoanalysis of that time."¹³ Probably more important in determining Freud's refusal was his unwillingness to openly contest the social order. His overriding concern was that the new science of psychoanalysis be accepted. This fear of consequences for his work had not always determined his behavior. In "'Civilized' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervousness" (1908), Freud made clear society's responsibility for a wide range of neurotic ills that crossed his couch, and in 1910 he even considered joining his movement to the "International Fraternity for Ethics and Culture" to fight against the repressive influence of church and state.¹⁴ Such decisiveness was soon replaced by more ambiguous social criticism

and, eventually, in "*Civilization and Its Discontents*" (1930), by an equally ambiguous defense of sexual repression. The very indefiniteness of the libido theory permitted such mutations. The orgasm theory, which identifies society's role in denying the cure as well as in providing the illness, put psychoanalysis on the collision course that Freud had so far successfully avoided.

Reich's other main contribution to psychoanalysis, besides the orgasm theory, is his theory of character structure. Reich understands character structure as the internalized pattern of behavior that each person brings to his daily tasks, as organized habit; it "represents the specific way of being of an individual" and is "an expression of his total past."¹⁵ In character structure, the typical reaction has become an automatic one. With this theoretical innovation, the transformation of the whole character replaced symptom relief as the goal of Reich's therapy.

Alfred Adler had already introduced the concept of character into the psychoanalytic lexicon, but for him it was a way of drawing attention away from the libido theory. He grasped character teleologically, in terms of the individual's will to power. Reich, on the other hand, accounts for character formation both causally, as a result of early repression, and functionally, as a requirement of the libido economy.

For Reich, character structure has its origins in the conflicts of the Oedipal period as ways of responding to external pressures and threats. Both its form and strength reflect the kind of repression which the individual was subjected to at this time. The motive for developing such a structure is conscious or unconscious fear of punishment. Consequently, Reich refers to character structure as a "narcissistic protection mechanism" and says it is composed of "attitudes of avoidance."¹⁶ By acting as parents want, or hiding what one does, or steeling oneself for a spanking, or any combination of these, the child transforms his spontaneity into character structure. Similar responses to teachers, priests, and others as the child grows reinforce and sometimes modify the pattern.

While protection against the outside world is the chief objective in the formation of character structure, this is not its main function in the adult individual. His intellect and muscular structure as well as various social institutions protect him against external dangers. After maturation, it is mainly against internal dangers, against unruly impulses, that character mechanisms guard.

In this case, character structure blocks the impulse and redirects its energy, acting both as suppressing agent and controller of the resulting anxiety. The energy that goes into the formation and maintenance of character structure also reduces the degree of repression needed by reducing the force of the drives to be repressed. Again, because of the energy expended in its maintenance, character structure serves as a means of reducing the tension that has built up as a result of its own operation.

Achieving impulse control in this manner has serious side effects on a person's overall motility and sensibility. According to Reich, it makes "an orderly sexual life and a full sexual experience impossible."¹⁷ The inhibitions and fears, the tense and awkward mannerisms, the stiffness and the deadness, all the manifestations of character structure work against the capacity to surrender in the sexual act and, thus, limit the degree of discharge attained in orgasm. Character structure also deadens people sufficiently for them to do the boring, mechanical work that is the lot of most people in capitalist society.¹⁸ The same dulling insulates people from outside stimuli, reducing the impact on them of further education and of life itself. Finally, the increased sexual stasis that results from damming up the libido is responsible for reaction formations, such as the development of an ascetic ideology, which in turn increases the stasis.

Freud had already noted several personality traits and problems that result from sexual repression. Among these are the actual neurosis, tension and anxiety ("modern nervousness"), attenuated curiosity, increased guilt and hypocrisy, timidity, and reduced sexual potency and pleasure. Freud even refers to repressed people as "good weaklings who later become lost in the crowd that tends to follow painfully the initiative of strong characters."¹⁹ This provocative remark is never developed. Reich, on the other hand, emphasizes those aspects of submissiveness and irrationality that we now associate with the notion of the authoritarian personality. For him, the most important result of sexual repression is that it "paralyzes the rebellious forces because any rebellion is laden with anxiety" and "produces, by inhibiting sexual curiosity and thinking in the child, a general inhibition of thinking and critical faculties."²⁰ And Reich is unique in rooting these negative qualities in the very character mechanisms responsible for self-repression.

Reich further divides the characterological effects of repression

into those that result from membership in a particular class and those that result from living in a class-dominated society. As influences on the instinctual apparatus differ broadly depending on a person's socio-economic position, so do certain basic personality traits: "One has only to think of well-known character types such as 'the bourgeois,' 'the official,' 'the proletarian,' etc."²¹ Reich's account of these differences within capitalism is extremely meager compared to what he has to say about that part of character structure that comes from living in class society.

According to Reich, "every social order creates those character forms which it needs for its preservation. In class society, the ruling class secures its position with the aid of education and the institution of the family, by making its ideology the ruling ideology of all members of the society. But it is not merely a matter of imposing ideologies, attitudes, and concepts on the members of society. Rather, it is a matter of a deep-reaching process in each new generation, of the formation of a psychic structure that corresponds to the existing social order in all strata of the population."²² Reich's concern here is with the widespread respect for private property and established authority, and with the dullness and irrationality that make it so difficult for people in all classes to recognize and act upon their interests. The problem, as he says in one place, is not why hungry people steal, but why they don't.²³

The two dimensions of character structure are not always easy to distinguish, and Reich himself often speaks as if the character of workers, for example, is all of a piece. Yet, the distinction between class-determined and class-society determined character must be maintained if Reich's contribution is to remain within a Marxist framework. As it stands, the notion of character structure qualifies the base-superstructure formulation of Marx by accounting for the origin and hold of ruling-class ideology on people who, nonetheless, possess distinctive class traits. In this way, the theory of character structure is as much a contribution to Marxism as it is to psychoanalysis.

Reich himself believed that with the notion of character structure he "bridged the gap" between social conditions and ideology in Marx's system.²⁴ It was now possible to supplement Marx's explanation of why people are driven to recognize their interests with an explanation of why, even in the most favorable conditions, they generally don't do so. This paradox is repre-

sented in Marx's writings by the tension between the theory of class consciousness and the theory of alienation. The tension remains unresolved, so that Marx never accounts for the workers' inability to attain class consciousness by referring to their alienation, nor qualifies their alienation with a reference to their skill in "calculating advantages."²⁵ Though Reich does not seem to have been very familiar with Marx's theory of alienation (the *German Ideology* and *1844 Manuscripts* first became available in 1929 and 1932 respectively), his concept of character structure can be viewed as bringing elements of this theory into the discussion of class consciousness.²⁶

III

In 1934, Reich summarized his position as follows:

Basically it contains three parts: 1) The concepts held in common with Freudian theory (the materialistic dialectic already developed by Freud). 2) Orgasm theory and character analysis as consistent extensions of Freud's natural science and simultaneously representing those theories that I opposed to the death-instinct theory and the interpretive techniques. Point two is still in the realm of psychology. 3) My own concepts of sexuality, based on the orgasm theory and transcending the spheres of psychology (sex-economy and sex-politics). Part three has merely points of contact with psychoanalysis. It forms an independent field: the basic law of the sexual process.²⁷

This essay has dealt so far with Reich's psychology. Attention will now be directed to the social analysis and political strategy that Reich derives from it.

For Reich, "the basic law of the sexual process" has to do with the forms taken by human sexuality, the influences under which these forms developed, their "metamorphoses," and their effect upon movements for social change. Marx had meant something very much like this in his discussion of economic laws. The question he set out to answer in *Capital* is "Why is labor represented by the value of its product and labor-time by the magnitude of that value?"²⁸ Reich's fundamental question may be paraphrased as follows: "Why is sex represented, on the one hand, as screwing and, on the other, as procreation?" In his answer,

Marx sought to explain how capitalist forms of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption arose, and how they are dependent on one another and on the character of human activity and achievement in areas far removed from the economy proper. Though much less systematic, Reich's account of sexual life in capitalism follows the same broad pattern.

The sexual drive is universal. Reich believes that every society structures man's sexuality by its kind and degree of repression, the sexual objects permitted, the opportunities made available, and the value set upon things sexual. In our era, the limits of sexuality are prescribed, particularly for women, by the twin values of premarital chastity and marital fidelity. These values prevailed, of course, in earlier patriarchal societies, but Reich's concern is with their special forms and functions in capitalism. The problem with premarital chastity, as every good observer knows, is that even small children desire sexual intercourse. In adolescence, long before marriage is possible, this desire becomes overpowering. Sexual desire shows as little concern for social conventions after marriage. Sooner or later, most (all?) couples find themselves sexually attracted to other people, leading to frequent infidelity and its concomitants of hypocrisy and divorce.

The sexual life of young people in capitalism is characterized by extreme frustration and guilt: guilt, because sexual activity of one kind or another occurs despite the social prohibition, and frustration, because such experiences are a fraction of what is desired. Virtually all adolescent boys and most adolescent girls masturbate, but their pleasure in this act is frequently spoiled by notions of sin and feelings of disgust and inadequacy. Homosexual encounters, which again are widespread in adolescence (and which Reich attributes to the early repression of heterosexuality), are even more laden with guilt feelings.²⁹ On the rare occasions when sexual intercourse occurs, it is hidden, done in great haste and worry over being discovered. Too often, youth's sexual ignorance and the unavailability or high cost of contraceptives take their toll in venereal diseases and unwanted pregnancies.

As indicated, the demands of bourgeois morality are directed primarily against women. Boys who have an active sexual life and married men who philander meet with mild disapproval, while girls and women who act in similar ways are generally viewed as outcasts. The greater repression of women that corresponds to

this double morality has the effect of removing most women as love partners for men. One result is the creation of a class of prostitutes and a general commercialization of sex outside of marriage. Another is the division that occurs in the sexuality of most men between the sentiments of tenderness and passion. The man gratifies his "brutish" sexuality with "fallen" girls, who are often of a lower class, and reserves his tenderness for girls of his own class whom he might marry. Reich says, it is no wonder that 90 percent of women and 50 percent of men have serious sexual problems; the essence of bourgeois morality is "sexual atrophy."³⁰

Within capitalist society, the fight against extramarital relations, prostitution, venereal disease, and abortion is fought in the name of abstinence. Yet, it is this very abstinence, with its attendant ignorance, that is responsible for these ills. When asked to do what is biologically impossible, people do what they can, with their real living conditions determining the forms this will take.

Reich places the origins of sexual repression in the period of transformation from matriarchal to patriarchal society. With the development of the institution of private property, men acquired an interest in marriage because of the dowry that came with it. The sexual repression of female children developed as a necessary means of getting them to accept the restraints imposed by the marriage bond.³¹ Young people who have an active love life before marriage find it difficult, if not impossible, to remain faithful to a single partner afterwards. The early rule regarding pre-marital chastity then was meant for women, and its application to men came later (where it came at all) and has never been as severe.

If the desire to accumulate property lies at the origins of sexual repression, its chief function today is to produce submissive beings of both sexes. In our treatment of character structure, the diminution of critical faculties, general passivity, resignation, and other negative effects of repression were identified. According to Reich, people's sexual satisfaction "is not simply satisfaction of a need, like hunger or defecation, but their spiritual development, their freshness of life, their capacity for work and their enthusiasm for struggle" are affected every bit as much by their sexual life as by their material existence.³² More important still, "the suppression of the gratification of primitive material needs has a result different from that of the suppression of the gratification of the sexual

needs. The former incites rebellion. The latter, however—by repressing the sexual needs and by becoming anchored by moralistic defense—paralyzes the rebellion against either kind of suppression.”³³ It is the greater suppression of women that makes them more apolitical and generally more passive than men.

The work of sexual suppression is carried on primarily by the family. In his Marxist period Reich believed the suppression that was most decisive in determining character occurred between the ages of four to six in the ways parents respond to sexual play and questions.³⁴ So important is the role of the family in these early years that Reich refers to it as the “factory of submissive beings.”³⁵ To him, it is no coincidence that “the lack of victorious spirit, the outlawry of protest, the absence of personal opinions characterizes the relations of faithful children to their parents just as they do the relations of devoted bureaucrats to the state authorities and that of non-class conscious workers to the owner of the factory.”³⁶

The same suppression that remakes the child’s character severely limits the possibilities of his social development generally. Sexual needs, by their very nature, drive the individual into relationships with other people. With their suppression, they find expression only in the family. This event “turns an original biological tie of the child to the mother—and of the mother to the child—into an indissoluble sexual fixation and thus creates the inability to establish new relationships. The core of the family tie is the mother fixation.”³⁷ Thus, the Oedipus complex is not one of the causes of sexual suppression, as Freud believed, but a major result. Other results are the guilt and sticky sentimentality that make any rational view of the family so difficult to achieve.

The family also plays the chief role in the character development of adolescents. The increase in libido that occurs at this time corresponds to an increased desire for independence, which in turn leads to a greater conflict with parents. Due to their early upbringing, most people, according to Reich, are more or less neurotic at the start of puberty. The neurosis and its accompanying social attitudes, however, only take on definitive form through the family conflicts of this period and, in particular, through the inhibition of a natural love life.³⁸

Sexual abstinence, by making adolescents more obedient, strengthens the father’s hand in any dispute. It also makes access to “social and sexual reality more difficult . . . when it doesn’t

make it altogether impossible."³⁹ If parents succeed in stifling this thrust for independence, the young person becomes more attached than ever to the pattern of behavior and authority relationships that prepare him for a life of political indifference and/or reaction. Reich notes that youth's views for and against the capitalist order correspond very closely to their views on the family—conservative youth respecting and often idealizing it, and radical youth opposing the family and, in the process, becoming quite independent of it.

The picture of family relations presented here applies throughout capitalist society, the differences between classes, according to Reich, being chiefly ones of degree. Bourgeois ideology in respect to marriage, family, premarital chastity, abortion, etc., has penetrated to all groups, though to none more than the bourgeoisie themselves. Reich believes that as a worker's income and style of life approach that of the bourgeoisie, as social respectability becomes possible, the sexual suppression of children is intensified. Minus these pretensions, working-class parents tend to be less repressive. To be sure, this is mostly due to the fact that they have less time to spend with their children, who are left to their own devices—and pleasures. Enough repression and moralizing occur even here, however, for the characters of most workers to exhibit many of the traits described above.⁴⁰

For the most part, religion and education only reinforce the moralistic attitudes that have already been inculcated in children by their parents. The link between sexual repression and religion has long been known. Every patriarchal religion, which means every modern religion, is antisexual to one degree or another. If God is always watching, if he even knows what we are thinking, what does he find out? He finds out what our confessor does—most confessions deal with masturbation and other sexual acts. Reich believes that beside serving as a brake to sexuality, religion offers an alternative outlet to the energy that has been repressed. Going beyond Marx, who said that religion functions socially as an opium, and Freud, who said that its beliefs are illusions, Reich maintains that religion is also a substitute for the very sexual feelings it helps to suppress. Praying, listening to organ or choral music, sitting in a dimly lit church, the ecstasy and mysticism of the true believer, are all, psychologically speaking, means to relieve unbearable sexual tension. They are only partially successful, but as long as the individual will not or cannot obtain full

sexual gratification, they perform a necessary stop-gap function. Adolescence, the time of increased sexual desire and repression, is also the period when religious feelings are most intense.⁴¹

Education contributes to sexual repression not only when it is openly antisexual as in some church schools, but also when it tries to ignore children's sexuality, when it puts the effects of sexual frustration and tension under other headings, such as "hyperactivity" or "laziness," in short, when it discusses everything but what children are thinking about. The so-called "objective" approach to sex education, which reduces sex to procreation and leave out all mention of desire, is equally destructive. For the result is that the sexually obsessed youngster, meaning practically all young people, considers himself a freak. His guilt mounts and the qualities born in repression become exaggerated.⁴²

Reich's account of the social function of sexual repression serves as the basis of his mass-psychological explanation of fascism, the social phenomenon that so baffled the intellectuals of his time. Reich does not deny the importance of the economic depression, the Versailles Treaty, or any of the other events that are generally held responsible for German developments. Nor does he disagree that fascism is objectively in the interests of big capitalists, who benefit most from Fascist economic policy, or that it is politically rooted, at least initially, in the lower middle class. However, he wants to know why fascism, this particular nonsolution to German problems, appealed to people, including workers. What was there in their lives and characters that prepared the way for the nationalist, racist, and imperialist propaganda of the Nazis? What was there in Nazi symbols, slogans, uniforms, etc. that was so attractive?

Reich's answer focuses on the authoritarian character structure that is produced by strict patriarchal families and sex-negating religion. The submissive, uncritical, sexually anxious person is drawn to fascism, first, as a means of opposing what are felt as threats to his neurotic equilibrium. In Fascist propaganda, Jews are consistently represented as sexual perverts, and communism as the sharing of women. The widespread mother fixation (referred to above) is taken advantage of by frequent comparisons of the nation to mother, and of the enemies of the nation (Jews, Communists, etc.) to those who would abuse mother. On the positive side, freedom for the nation and race compensate for personal misery, particularly in the sexual realm. Moreover, like

religion, the ceremonies and rituals of fascism offer an alternative outlet for sexual tension, a means to reduce the intolerable frustration that is the lot of most of its followers. Uncritical support for the Leader is a chance—maybe the sexually blocked person's only chance—to "let go." Sexuality, through repression, has metamorphosed into sentiments and ways of functioning that—in circumstances of capitalist decay—make fascism appealing. The rich assortment of evidence and argument that Reich brings together in support of this thesis (material I have barely touched upon) makes *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* the major achievement of his Marxist period.⁴³

IV

Reich's concern with the laws of the sexual process was not an academic one. Like Marx, he wanted to learn how society works in order to change it. He knew that sexual repression cannot be completely abolished until the conditions that require and promote it—including family, religion and private property—have all disappeared. And until that time, the effects of repression will hamper all attempts at radical change. The question arises whether in these conditions radical change is possible at all.

Asking this question does not place Reich beyond the bounds of a Marxist analysis. The mode of production is still the main factor in determining the character of social conditions generally. Society is still divided into classes based primarily on people's relationship to the mode of production. Workers still have an objective interest in making a socialist revolution, a revolution that will one day do away with all repression, including sexual repression. The fact remains, however, that a successful socialist revolution requires most workers to become conscious of their interests now, under capitalism, and this has never occurred. Reich's account of the social function of sexual repression provides an important and hitherto neglected part of the explanation, but as an explanation it offers little hope for change. If sexual repression produces submissive, uncritical workers who in turn set up authoritarian families, there doesn't seem to be any place to break the circle.

Reich's own response is twofold: first, he believes it is possible to fight against the suppressions of youth from outside the family,

to conduct a political struggle on behalf of youth's right to love. And, second, he believes that the range of rationality of many adults can be extended by speaking to their most personal problems and showing the link between these problems and the capitalist system.

Reich tried to put his ideas into practice in Austria (1929–1930) and Germany (1930–1932). With four other radical analysts and three obstetricians, he founded the "Socialist Society for Sex Hygiene and Sexological Research." Six clinics were set up in working-class areas of Vienna. Later, when Reich moved to Berlin, he convinced the Communist leadership to unite several sexual-reform movements into one sex-political organization under the aegis of the party. Membership grew quickly to around 40,000 people. Reich was the organization's chief spokesman on sexual questions until the end of 1932 when the Communist Party prohibited the further distribution of his works, charging that his emphasis on sexuality was un-Marxist.

As we saw, Reich did not deny the Marxist interpretation of social conditions or, for that matter, the existence of other natural drives, but his special interest in human irrationality led him to focus on the modes of sexuality he believed most responsible for it. Unfortunately for him, what was sufficiently Marxist for the German Communist leadership in 1930 and 1931 was not so in late 1932 in the face of growing reaction in the Soviet Union and when, it appears, the need to attract Christians to an anti-Fascist front was raised to a higher priority. Despite the strong support of his co-workers, Reich was ousted from the Communist Party in February 1933.⁴⁴

During his years as a sex-political activist, Reich directed most of his efforts toward working-class youth. In talks, articles, and some personal consultation, he sought to clarify their sexual confusion. Rather than "promote sex," as he was often accused of doing, he concentrated on correcting the false notions that underly most sexual prohibitions (sex needs no promoting), and on linking youth's sexual plight to life in capitalism. Intercourse, masturbation, sexual desire, orgasm, venereal disease, abortion, etc. were all discussed in connection with existing repression and the social prerequisites for a healthy sexual life. Reich scorned a false neutrality, and placed himself four-square on the side of young people and their physical needs. The results, he tells us, were widespread enthusiasm, more effective work on the part of

youth who were already radicalized and the radicalization of many who were formerly apolitical.

To lead a healthy sexual life, what adolescents need is complete and accurate sexual information, free access to contraceptives, time to be alone with the other sex, and their own rooms. Adolescents, who want sexual happiness more than anything else, are all more or less aware of these needs. No matter what their political views, Reich believes, they can be appealed to and won over by a platform that addresses itself to these questions. Explaining their sexual suffering is the best way to make youth understand their total oppression in capitalism. This view is qualified by Reich's admission that the strongest impulse to revolutionary sentiment in the young comes from identification with class-conscious parents or older siblings. However, there are very few such adults, and most youth must be won over to socialism by other means.⁴⁵

For all but a few youth who live in nonrepressive socialist families (this is, of course, a matter of degree) the adoption of an anticapitalist perspective begins with rebellion against the father. Striving for independence is a natural phenomenon of puberty. It is always connected with intensified sexual feelings and a greater consciousness of surroundings, including social impingements of various sorts. In this context, rebellion against the father, who represents state authority in the family, carries with it a tendency to opt for left politics. To the oft-repeated criticism that young radicals are simply rebelling against their fathers, Reich seems to answer—yes and no. Yes, every adolescent growing up in a repressive family rebels against his father; no, this rebellion is not simply against father, but against authoritarian relationships and abuses throughout society. Moreover, Reich believes, it is generally the scope and success of this rebellion that foretells who will be a revolutionary and who will be apolitical.⁴⁶

Reich's strategy for politicizing the sexual struggle of youth is clearly prefigured in his analysis of sexuality and repression under capitalism. The same cannot be said of his strategy for developing class consciousness among adults. Much of what he says about authoritarian character structure makes it appear that nothing short of therapy or revolution would have a radicalizing effect. Yet, particularly in his essay "What Is Class Consciousness?," Reich argues as if a different approach by Communist parties could convince many adults of the need for a revolution.

To begin, Reich says, it is important to recognize that the class consciousness of workers is somewhat different from that of their leaders. A class-conscious worker understands his needs in every area of life, the means and possibilities of satisfying them, the difficulties in the way of doing so, his own inhibitions and anxieties, and his invincibility when acting as part of the class. Their class-conscious leaders, as Reich calls members of the Communist Party, understand all this as well as the historical process outlined by Marx. Furthermore, they are (or should be) particularly aware of the progressive ideas, wishes and emotions that come with being a worker as well as of their conservative counterparts and of the anxiety that holds the former in check.

Reich says that, for the proletariat, working in industry and belonging to a union are the most important influences in becoming class conscious. They permit each individual to see himself as a member of a class and to learn something of the position of this class in the economy. But this is not enough. While he remains ignorant of how the rest of his life is affected by his role as a worker in capitalist society, he will desire only limited reforms.

Unfortunately, most workers are interested in social problems only insofar as these problems enter into everyday life. The only oppression they recognize is that which involves eating, sleeping, working, making love, walking, shopping, etc. The precise form of each of these activities (meaning, too, why they are so unsatisfactory) is, to a very large extent, given by the capitalist system in which it occurs. Yet, Marxists on the whole have paid little attention to the variety of ways this system intrudes into the personal lives of its inhabitants. Reich would reverse this trend. He wants socialists to hold up the personal life as a mirror in which people can catch sight of their oppression and of the possibilities for change.

Among the practical suggestions Reich offers to realize this strategy are more public lectures on personal problems, setting up consultation and sex hygiene centers, starting radical theaters to do plays on everyday life from a socialist perspective, and devoting three-quarters of every radical newspaper to communications with readers, again, on personal problems.

Reich's insight into the irrational aspects of character is also the basis for his advice on how to improve socialist propaganda. It is wrong, for example, to constantly stress the power of the

ruling class. This not only creates fear but feeds the worker's authoritarian complex. The weaknesses and stupidities of the capitalists should be stressed instead. He believes, too, that it is wrong to present the main symbol for authority in society, the police, as the enemy, for again this activates authoritarian tendencies. Reich would have socialists emphasize that the police are also workers. Indeed, he says, that concentrating on the class nature of personal problems, problems which they as workers share, will bring many police over to the side of revolution.

Reich also argues that socialist propaganda should be positive and preparatory to the new life awaiting people, as well as being critical. Workers must be helped to see how work conditions and relations would be different in socialism. Women must be given some idea of how cooperative living would deal with the problems of housework and child care. The same applies, of course, to youth, professionals, farmers, and even the police and the army. In every case, when contrasting present dissatisfaction to the socialist alternative, care must be taken to show the special responsibility of the capitalist system and what the people appealed to can do to change it.⁴⁷

Most of what Reich advocates here, as regards both what to do and say, has been put into practice by one or another radical group in the years since he wrote. Anarchists, hippies, women's liberation, black and brown revolutionaries and, occasionally, Marxists have all sought to radicalize people by helping them draw lessons from their personal lives. Only Reich, however, has tried to systematize this approach. Only Reich recognizes that sexual concerns are at the center of most people's personal lives. And only Reich bases his strategy on a deep-going socio-psychological analysis of life in capitalist society.

V

The criticism of Reich that one hears most often today is that the situation he described has ceased to exist, that for young people the sexual revolution has already taken place. When Daniel Guérin, the French anarchist, suggested this in a talk he gave to Belgian students, he was met with a loud chorus of "no, not true."⁴⁸ Certainly, some of the basic facts have altered. The pill did not exist forty years ago. Reich's discussion of the dangers of

venereal disease was also written before the discovery of penicillin. Politically, some humanizing reforms have taken place, the most recent being the abortion laws passed by many American states. Socially, there is more sex with less guilt—or so it appears. Information and pseudo-information, sexy books, films, and advertisements (and with them sexual stimulation) are all more readily available. Psychologically, people are more open to discussions about sex, more ready to accept it as a natural and necessary function even outside marriage than ever before.

What needs to be stressed, however, is that such changes have only improved, and not by much, a very bad situation. On the basis of their own generally liberated sexual lives, young radicals tend to overestimate the degree to which the mores of their peers in out-of-the-way schools and jobs have altered. Furthermore, a lot of what passes for sexual freedom—the wife-trading of the suburbanite, the frantic consumption of pornography, the boom in homosexuality, orgies—have, if Reich is to be believed, little to do with sexual happiness. Instead, they appear to be strong indications of sexual dissatisfaction and evidence of the continued effect of sexual repression.

Most important, youth of all classes still do not receive sufficient information. Contraceptives remain a problem for many. Rooms to be alone with members of the opposite sex are generally unavailable (making love in cars is not a satisfactory substitute). Parents still suppress overt sexuality and offer indirect answers or worse to sexual questions. Religious training continues to produce guilt, and schools to frown on all manifestations of sexuality. Thus, Reich's analysis still applies and the radicalizing potential of his writings even today is enormous. If anything, our greater openness on sexual matters enhances this potential by making it easier to get Reich's ideas the wide hearing that was denied them earlier.

If Reich's analysis of the sexual repression of youth and his strategy to combat it are as useful as ever, his strategy for developing class consciousness in adults is open to the same objectives now that it was then. I have already said that, in my opinion, Reich's analysis of authoritarian character structure makes it doubtful that the measures he advocates for modifying this structure once it has taken hold will do much good. Even if he is correct that helping adults understand the social function of sexual repression and their own sexual misery makes them better parents (a doubtful assumption), it is unlikely that their political attitudes

will undergo much change. With few real possibilities to improve their love lives—with their social situation and character rigidities fixed—the enlightenment Reich offers is more likely to create anxiety and to arouse hostility and fear. Moreover, the corresponding effort to liberate youth, with its concomitant of family conflict, is bound to be taken as a threat by most parents and to influence the way they react to Reich's teachings as a whole. This is not an argument against a politics that focuses on the personal life, but is a reason for not expecting too much from it.

Reich's adult politics suffers from not making adequate distinctions between adults in different age groups and different family situations. Those who do not have teen-age children and whose character structures and familial situations have not taken final shape, in short, young adults, are the only ones Reich's strategy could favorably affect. Older people are likely to react only negatively.

Reich's strategy, then, is one for influencing children, adolescents, and young adults. Therefore, it is a long-term strategy. It is an attempt to assure that ten, twenty, and more years from now oppressed people will respond to the inevitable crises that occur in capitalism in a rational manner, in ways best suited to promote their interests. The upsurge of fascism and the need for an immediate response to it inclined Reich to see in his findings a way to alter adult consciousness. It was not, and, despite all recent changes, is not still.

If German political events pushed Reich into misrepresenting his long-term strategy as a short-term one, it is important to see that this error was abetted by his conceptual scheme. Reich was able to conceive of his strategy drawing psychologically crippled people into the revolutionary movement, because, for all his effort to create a Marxist psychology, he kept his psychological and sociological findings in separate mental compartments. Rather than combine Marx and Freud, Reich showed that the main discoveries of these two giants are complementary and argued that each needed supplementing by the other. This is what he tried to do in taking psychoanalysis, as he believed, to its logical conclusion. But the basic conceptions with which Marx and Freud circumscribe their respective subject matters are hardly tampered with. Reich's "logical conclusion" is not without its logical problems.⁴⁹ The exception is the concept of character structure that Reich introduced to capture the meeting place of Marx and

Freud's teachings, but progress to and from this junction is made within two incompatible schemes.

Freud's categories of instinct, id, energy, ego, neurosis, etc., which Reich passes on, all focus on the individual in abstraction from his social situation. Marx's categories of class, value, exploitation, mode of production, etc., which are also passed on, focus on the social situation. Freud does not neglect society, but—except for early family training—relegates it to the background. Individuals, he believes, enter into social relationships only to satisfy needs. Marx does not neglect the individual and his needs, but for him they have no existence outside the social situation. These opposing views as to what is important are embedded in their conceptual schemes. And though both thinkers accept an interrelationship between phenomena on all levels, the concepts each uses convey a distorted, one-sided view of the phenomena studied by the other. Reich was unusual in adopting both conceptual schemes and applying, on each occasion, the one that was most appropriate to his subject matter—Freud for individuals and Marx for society. When the two led to different conclusions on a topic that spanned both systems, Reich was at liberty to choose either one. This is what happened when his study of character structure carried on within a Freudian framework indicated workers could not become class conscious, and his study of character structure carried on within a Marxist framework indicated they could.

To correct this double distortion, a set of concepts must be constructed that unites the two perspectives so that Freud's discoveries are not attached as an afterthought to Marx's, nor Marx's to Freud's, and so that attention to one oversight does not lead to getting lost in the other. What are needed are concepts to "think" man in all his concreteness, man as he is and becomes, and not as he has been carved up by competing disciplines.

I should like to propose the concept "relations of maturation," understood as the interaction between natural growth and the sum of the conditions in which it occurs, as a first step in uniting the Marxian and Freudian perspectives. Just as Marx in his concept "relations of production" sought to bring out the fact that production is more than the act of making something, that it includes distribution, exchange, and consumption in a complex pattern that takes us eventually into every area of life—in the same way, by "relations of maturation" I intend to highlight the fact that

maturation is more than the physical process of growth, that it includes the full conditions in which human development occurs and particularly the effect upon the individual of family, church, school, and media.

Within the context of the relations of maturation, desire, for example, is seen as a structure that includes libido, the developmental stages through which an individual passes, and the objects made available by circumstance. As such, desire is rooted as much in history as in biological processes. The puberty of todays' youth becomes a capitalist social relation.

The individual himself is no longer independent of his setting, nor is he absorbed by it. If Freud grasps man as a biological entity, and Marx as a social relationship, I am proposing that he be grasped as a bio-social relationship. The dialectical character of Marx's conception is retained, but merely extended (perhaps simply explicitly extended) to cover elements whose great importance has been demonstrated by Freud. The interaction and flux of all elements within the relations of maturation are taken as given, so that one may focus on any segment without becoming one-sided.

It was the lack of concepts like relations of maturation, of adequate means to think his subject matter, that led to a contradiction between Reich's psychological analysis and his political strategy for adults. Perhaps more important, it made possible, if not likely, Reich's own drift away from radical politics. The immediate cause, of course, lay in his mistreatment at the hands of the German Communist Party and his growing disillusionment with the Soviet Union. Stalinist politics had a similar effect on many intellectuals of the period. What makes Reich's case different and, consequently, what makes this an inadequate explanation for his turn-about is that he understood better than most of his equally tramped-on comrades why "Thermidor" happened. Moreover, Reich's analysis of capitalism is in no way faulted by the reaction he saw in the Soviet Union.⁵⁰ So it is that Reich continued to espouse a revolutionary war against capitalism for a few years after his ouster from the Communist Party.⁵¹

Then, the analysis underlying his political stance began to erode. It began to erode because Reich, still operating with two conceptual schemes, introduced psychological concepts to help explain social phenomena, such as the policy of the Communist Party. Marxism was clearly insufficient to account for the behavior

of the largest Marxist organization. But Freud's and Marx's concepts are incompatible; they cannot occupy the same account. With the introduction of Freud's psychology into the social realm, Marxism was pushed aside.

It is not clear when exactly Reich ceased to be a Marxist, but after *The Sexual Revolution* (1936) the class analysis that served as the social framework for his psychology gradually disappeared. The parts—Reich's Marxism and Freudianism—became disconnected because they were never conceptually welded together. With his Marxism gone, Reich eventually fell prey to the same mistake for which he had earlier condemned other psychoanalysts, to wit, generalizing from the individual to society and treating the latter as the patient. The result was the notion of the emotional plague, understood as the irrational social activity of sexually sick people, which he then, in good psychoanalytic fashion, blew up to be the determining force in history.⁵²

Reich's later work, as fascinating and controversial as it is, lies outside the bounds of this essay. My interest has been to show that Reich's analysis of capitalist relations of maturation and the political strategy for youth and young adults based upon it are, for all the updating required, extremely relevant today. To determine how relevant we must study recent developments in sexual life as well as Reich's writings, and test our conclusions in revolutionary practice.⁵³

Notes

1. Wilhelm Reich, "Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis," translated by A. Bostock *Studies on the Left*, 6, no. 4 (1966): 41.
2. Karl Marx, *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, translated by N. I. Stone (Chicago: Kerr, 1904), pp. 11–12.
3. Wilhelm Reich, "Pour l'application de la psychanalyse à la recherche historique," *Matérialisme dialectique, matérialisme historique et psychanalyse* (Paris, 1970), pp. 37–38.
4. Wilhelm Reich, "Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis," p. 6.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 12. For Freud's views see *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, translated by A. A. Brill (New York: Dutton, 1962), pp. 74–76.
6. Wilhelm Reich, *Reich on Freud*, edited by M. Higgins and C. Raphael (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1967), p. 15.

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7. Wilhelm Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, translated by T. P. Wolfe (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1961), p. 9.
8. See, particularly, Freud's "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," *Collected Papers*, vol. 4, translated by Jean Riviere (London: Hogarth, 1956).
9. For a clear statement of such criticisms from a radical vantage point (the authors would not call themselves Marxists), see H. Gerth, and C. W. Mills, *Character and Social Structure* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954), pp. 8-9.
10. For Reich's development of Freud's theory of the neurosis see *Function of the Orgasm*, pp. 66-72.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
14. Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, vol. II (New York: Basic Books, 1955), p. 67.
15. Wilhelm Reich, *Character Analysis*, translated by T. P. Wolfe (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1970), p. 44.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 158, 185.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 148-149.
18. Wilhelm Reich, *People in Trouble* (Rangely, Maine: 1953), p. 74. This highly provocative remark appears in an essay written in 1936-1937; it was never developed.
19. Sigmund Freud, "'Civilized' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervousness," *Collected Papers*, vol. II, translated by Joan Riviere (London: Hogarth, 1948). Unfortunately, this explosive essay receives little attention today.
20. Wilhelm Reich, *Mass Psychology of Fascism*, translated by T. P. Wolfe (New York: Orgone Institute Press, 1946), p. 25. Other effects of sexual repression noted by Reich are "the pallor, depression, nervousness, disturbances in the ability to work, quarrelsomeness, criminal inclination and perversion." *People in Trouble*, p. 81. Reich found strong support for his and Freud's views on the characterological effects of repression in Bronislaw Malinowski's comparison of the Trobriand Islanders, who have sexual intercourse from about the age of five, with their close neighbors, the Amphlett Islanders, who share our sexual taboos. See, particularly, Malinowski's *The Sexual Life of Savages* (London: G. Routledge and Sons, 1930). Despite such confirmation, it must be admitted that this central thesis of Reich's work is still not wholly understood or verified.
21. *Character Analysis*, p. 146.
22. *Ibid.*, XXLL.
23. Wilhelm Reich (pseudonym Ernst Parell), *Was ist Klassenbewusstsein?* (Copenhagen, 1934), p. 17.
24. *People in Trouble*, p. 46.

25. This useful caption for the rational qualities Marx ascribes to workers comes from Thorstein Veblen's *The Place of Science in Modern Civilization and Other Essays* (New York: Russell, 1961), p. 441.
26. For a discussion of Marx's theory of alienation, see my book, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).
27. Reich on Freud, pp. 197-198. Reich's best account of Freud's materialist dialectic appears in "Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis," *Studies on the Left*, pp. 22-39.
28. Karl Marx, *Capital I*, translated by S. Moore and E. Aveling (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1958), p. 80.
29. For Reich's views on homosexuality see his *La lutte sexuelle des jeunes* (Paris, 1966), pp. 93-100.
30. Wilhelm Reich, *La crise sexuelle* (Paris, 1965), p. 58.
31. The origins of sexual repression is the subject of an entire book: Reich, Wilhelm, *Der Einbruch der Sexualmoral* (Berlin, 1932). Reich never gives the same attention to the historical development of sexual repression that he gives to its origins and forms under capitalism. For a Marxist, this is a serious shortcoming.
32. *La lutte sexuelle des jeunes*, p. 107.
33. *Mass Psychology of Fascism*, pp. 25-26.
34. *La crise sexuelle*, p. 70.
35. *La lutte sexuelle des jeunes*, p. 119.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Mass Psychology of Fascism* p. 47-48.
38. *People in Trouble*, p. 82.
39. *La crise sexuelle*, p. 70.
40. For Reich's treatment of the family see, particularly, *The Sexual Revolution*, translated by T. P. Wolfe (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1951), pp. 71-80; and *Mass Psychology of Fascism*, pp. 28-62, 88-96.
41. For his treatment of religion see, particularly, *Mass Psychology of Fascism*, pp. 122-142.
42. For his treatment of sex education see, particularly, *The Sexual Revolution*, pp. 61-70.
43. Erich Fromm's better known psychological study of fascism, *Escape from Freedom* (1942) cribs very heavily, and without acknowledgement, from Reich's *Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933).
44. The chief source of information on Reich's sex-political activities is the semi-autobiographical work, *People in Trouble*.
45. *La lutte sexuelle des jeunes* was written for young people in an attempt to politicize their sexual struggle.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 119-123.

47. *Was ist Klassenbewusstsein?* is rich in suggestions on how to radicalize people on the basis of their unsatisfactory personal lives.
48. Guérin, D., *Essai sur la révolution sexuelle* (Paris, 1969), p. 25.
49. Reich showed some awareness of this failure in his later life when he admitted that his attempt to unite Marx and Freud "failed logically." *People in Trouble*, p. 42.
50. Reich's fascinating account of the sexual changes and reforms that took place in the Soviet Union after the revolution and the subsequent reaction is found in *The Sexual Revolution*, Part II.
51. *Was ist Klassenbewusstsein?*, pp. 40-41.
52. For a discussion of the Emotional Plague see *Character Analysis*, pp. 248-280. This chapter was added in the third edition, 1948.
53. *Wilhelm Reich: From the Marxist Years*, edited by Lee Baxendall (New York, forthcoming, 1972) will bring together Reich's most important Marxist essays, including several which have not yet appeared in English. This will enable English speaking readers to acquire, for the first time, a clear understanding of Reich's Marxism. The reason is that the English editions of *Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1946) and *The Sexual Revolution* (1945), the best known works of Reich's Marxist period, underwent political adulteration at Reich's own hands. Without actually altering the substance of these two works, Reich made clear his new political stance and left out prefaces and numerous statements and bits of analysis which had contributed to their Marxist character.

There is no good biography of Reich available. The only English language account of Reich's life and work to which I can, in good conscience, refer readers is Paul Edwards brief essay, "Wilhelm Reich," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. VII, edited by Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 104-115. The case is quite different in France where several useful works emphasizing Reich's Marxist period have appeared in the last few years. The best of these is Constantin Sinelnikoff's *L'oeuvre de Wilhelm Reich* (Paris: Maspero, 1970).

For a bibliography of Reich's writings see *Wilhelm Reich: Selected Writings*, edited by M. Higgins (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1960), pp. 549-557. Miss Higgins neglects to name the journal in which most of Reich's Marxist essays were published; it is the "Zeitschrift für Politische Psychologie und Sexualökonomie." In her substantial biographical note, she also neglects to mention that Reich was a Communist. Many of the people attracted to Reich's later scientific work are embarrassed by his Marxist past.

The Frankfurt School and the Genesis of Critical Theory*

Martin Jay

Among the many changes brought by the First World War, one of the most far-reaching in terms of its impact on intellectuals was the shifting of the Socialist center of gravity eastward. The unexpected success of the Bolshevik revolution in contrast to the dramatic failure of its central European imitators created a serious dilemma for those who had previously been at the center of European Marxism, the left-wing intellectuals of Germany. In rough outline, the choices left to them were as follows. First, they might support the moderate Socialists of the German Social Democratic Party (S.P.D.) and their newly created Weimar Republic, thus eschewing revolution and scorning the Russian experiment. Or second, they could accept Moscow's leadership, join the newly formed German Communist Party (K.P.D.), and work to undermine Weimar's bourgeois compromise. Although rendered more immediate by the war and the rise of the moderate Socialists to power, these alternatives in one form or another had been at the center of Socialist controversies for decades. A third course of action, however, was almost entirely a product of the radical disruptions of Marxist assumptions brought by the war and its after-

* In a different version, this essay will form part of a longer work to be published by Little-Brown.

math. This last alternative was the searching reexamination of the very foundations of Marxist theory with the dual hope of explaining past errors and preparing for future action.

Although one of the questions raised in the ensuing analysis was the correct relation of theory to practice, the demands of rigorous theorizing often entailed the suspension of political activity. When it did not, as in the well-known case of Georg Lukács, the integrity of the analysis might be sacrificed to the pressures of political orthodoxy. When external conditions and personal inclinations permitted a commitment to theory outweighing an obligation to party, however, the full implications of the analysis could be pursued. Such was the case with the young intellectuals of the Institut für Sozialforschung.

The Institut für Sozialforschung was founded in 1923 as an independently endowed institute for the exploration of social phenomena. From its inception, its perspective was Marxist, although it refused to align itself with any of the political factions on the Weimar Left. In 1930, Max Horkheimer, who with Felix Weil and Friedrich Pollock had founded the Institut, replaced Carl Grünberg as its director. Grünberg had been schooled in Austro-Marxism and was interested primarily in the history of the labor movement. Horkheimer, on the other hand, was more philosophically oriented and had a greater concern for cultural phenomena. Under his leadership, the Institut coalesced into a distinct "Frankfurt School" with its own theoretical approach, combining elements of Marxism, psychoanalysis, and other intellectual traditions and known as "Critical Theory."

By the time the Institut was forced to flee from Germany in 1933, it had established a house organ, the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, to replace Grünberg's *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung*. It also had gathered together a core of gifted young academics trained in a variety of disciplines. Among these were Leo Lowenthal, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, and Theodor W. Adorno (who, while he did not join officially until 1938, had contributed to the *Zeitschrift* from the beginning). After a year in Geneva, the Institut moved to Columbia University in New York where new members such as Franz Neumann and Otto Kirschheimer were soon added to its staff. Throughout the thirties, it continued to maintain ties with Europe through branches in Geneva, Paris, and for a time, London. These helped in the gathering of information for its

empirical work, most notably the *Studien über Autorität und Familie* (1936), and served as a liaison with members still in Europe, such as Walter Benjamin.

After the United States entered the war in the early forties, the Institut's activities were curtailed while many of its members joined government service. Horkheimer, Adorno, and later Pollock moved to southern California where they wrote extensively on theoretical matters, producing the important summations of the Frankfurt School's thinking in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1947). They also contributed to a series of *Studies in Prejudice*, the most celebrated of which was *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950). Then in the early fifties, the Institut accepted the German government's invitation to return to Frankfurt. Horkheimer and Adorno were named co-directors; Pollock retained his position as the Institut's administrative head. Other former members chose to remain in the United States where they had established successful academic careers.

The isolation of its exile ended, the Frankfurt School began to exert a considerable influence on a new generation of German students. A significant element of the critique of German society produced by the nascent New Left in the sixties was derived from Critical Theory. Ironically, Critical Theory's originators in the Institut often disavowed the use to which it was put by the New Left. Before his death in 1969, Adorno, who had become the Institut's sole director following Horkheimer's partial retirement to Switzerland, was embroiled in a series of controversies with radical students in Frankfurt. The most frequent charge was that he had withdrawn into the very contemplative posture Critical Theory had always castigated. In the United States, on the other hand, Marcuse's variation of the Frankfurt School's position seemed to remain more faithful to its original stress on the necessity for radical *praxis*.

What follows is part of a larger work on the Institut's history. It includes a discussion of Critical Theory as it was developed primarily in the essays Horkheimer wrote for the *Zeitschrift* during the thirties. Much of Adorno's work in the period before he officially became an Institut member—his studies of Husserl and Kierkegaard, for example¹—refined many of the same ideas as do Marcuse's essays written after his break with his former teacher, Martin Heidegger.² Space limitations, however, prevent our including them in this essay. The same is regrettably true of the

Freudian dimension of the Institut's work, most prominently developed in Fromm's *Zeitschrift* articles. Nor can we devote adequate space to the application of Critical Theory to the host of cultural and social problems that occupied members of the Institut's staff. English-speaking readers interested in pursuing these questions further might look at the collection of essays in Lowenthal's *Literature and the Image of Man*³ and Adorno's *Prisms*.⁴ Fromm, Neumann, and Kirchheimer have already enjoyed an extensive American readership, but their work ought not to be taken without reservation as representative of the Frankfurt School. Their methodological and theoretical assumptions often diverged from those outlined here. Horkheimer, who was in fact the dominant figure in the Institut's development, has received far less attention than some of his junior colleagues. What follows will hopefully bring into focus his contribution to one of the most creative revisions of Marxism in this century, the Critical Theory of the Institut für Sozialforschung.

At the very heart of Critical Theory was an aversion to closed philosophical systems. To present it as such would, therefore, distort its essentially open-ended, probing, unfinished quality. It was no accident that Horkheimer chose to articulate his ideas in essays and aphorisms rather than in the cumbersome tomes so characteristic of German philosophy. Although Adorno and Marcuse were less reluctant to speak through completed books, they too resisted the temptation to make those books into positive, systematic philosophical statements. Instead, Critical Theory, as its name implies, was expressed through a series of critiques of other thinkers and philosophical traditions. Its development was, thus, through dialogue, its genesis as dialectical as the method it purported to apply to social phenomena. Only by confronting it in its own terms, as a gadfly of other systems, can it be fully understood. What this essay will attempt to do, therefore, is to present Critical Theory as it was first generated in the 1930s through contrapuntal interaction both with other schools of thought and with a changing social reality.

To trace the origins of Critical Theory to their true source, however, would require an extensive analysis of the intellectual ferment of the 1840s, perhaps the most extraordinary decade in nineteenth-century German intellectual history. It was then that Hegel's successors first applied his philosophical insights to the social and political phenomena of a Germany setting out on a

course of rapid modernization. The accomplishments of the so-called Left Hegelians were, of course, soon eclipsed by those of the most talented of their number, Karl Marx. And in time, the philosophical cast of their thinking, shared by the young Marx himself, was superseded by a more "scientific" and sometimes positivistic approach to social reality by both Marxists and nonMarxists alike. By the late nineteenth century, social theory in general had ceased being "critical" and "negative" in the sense to be explained below.

The recovery of the Hegelian roots of Marxist thought was delayed until after World War I for reasons Karl Korsch brilliantly outlined almost a half century ago.⁵ Only then were serious epistemological and methodological questions asked about a Marxist theory of society, which, despite (or perhaps because of) its scientific pretensions, had degenerated into a kind of metaphysics not unlike that which Marx himself had set out to dismantle. Ironically, a new understanding of Marx's debt to Hegel, that most metaphysical of thinkers, served to undermine the different kind of metaphysics that had entered vulgar Marxism through the back door of scientism. Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* and Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy* were the most influential stimulants to the recovery in the early 1920s of the philosophical dimension in Marxism. Much of what they argued was confirmed a decade later with the revelations produced by the circulation of Marx's long-neglected Paris manuscripts. When, for one reason or another, their efforts faltered, the task of reinvigorating Marxist theory was taken up primarily by the young thinkers at the Institut für Sozialforschung.

On one level, then, it can be argued that the Frankfurt School was returning to the concerns of the Left Hegelians of the 1840s. Like that first generation of critical theorists, its members were interested in the integration of philosophy and social analysis. They, likewise, were concerned with the dialectical method devised by Hegel and sought, as had their predecessors, to turn it in a materialist direction. And finally, like many of the Left Hegelians, they were particularly interested in exploring the possibilities for human action to transform the social order.

The intervening century, however, had brought enormous changes which made the conditions of their theorizing vastly different. Whereas the Left Hegelians were the immediate successors of the German Classical Idealists, the Frankfurt School was separated from Kant and Hegel by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Dilthey,

Bergson, Weber, Husserl, and many others, not to mention the systematization of Marxism itself. As a result, Critical Theory had to reassert itself against a score of competitors who had driven Hegel from the field. And, of course, it could not help being influenced by certain of their ideas. But even more important, vital changes in social, economic, and political conditions between the two periods had unmistakable repercussions on the revived Critical Theory. Indeed, according to its own premises, this was inevitable. The Left Hegelians wrote in a Germany just beginning to feel the effects of capitalist modernization. By the time of the Frankfurt School, Western capitalism, with Germany as one of its leading representatives, had entered a qualitatively new stage dominated by growing monopolies and increasing governmental intervention in the economy. The only real examples of socialism available to the Left Hegelians had been a few isolated utopian communities. The Frankfurt School, on the other hand, had the ambiguous success of the Soviet Union to ponder. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, the first critical theorists had lived at a time when the stirrings of a new “negative” force in society, the proletariat, could be seen as the agent of fulfillment of their philosophy. By the 1930s, however, signs of the proletariat’s integration into society were becoming increasingly apparent. This was especially evident to the members of the Institut after their emigration to the United States. Thus, it might be said of the first generation of critical theorists of the 1840s that theirs was an “immanent” critique of society based on the existence of a real historical “subject.” By the time of its renaissance in the twentieth century, Critical Theory was increasingly forced into a position of “transcendence” by the withering away of the revolutionary working class.

In the first decade of the Institut’s existence after 1923, however, the signs of this change were still unclear. As many of the aphorisms in Horkheimer’s pseudonymously published *Dämmerung*⁶ reveal, the Frankfurt School did not consider the German working class, badly split though it was, as entirely moribund. The younger members of the Institut still shared the belief of its older, more orthodox leaders around Grünberg that socialism might still be a real possibility in the advanced countries of the West. After the Institut’s resettlement at Columbia, however, the tone of its work underwent a subtle shift in a pessimistic direction. In part, this was due to the sensitive situation in which its

members found themselves at Columbia. In part it also reflected the Institut's growing aversion to the brand of Marxism, equated with orthodoxy, of the Soviet camp. But, perhaps most fundamentally, it expressed a growing loss of that basic confidence that Marxists of all kinds had traditionally felt in the revolutionary potential of the proletariat.

In their attempt to achieve a new perspective that might make the new situation intelligible in a framework that was still fundamentally Marxist, the members of the Frankfurt School were fortunate in having had philosophical training outside the Marxist tradition. Like other twentieth-century contributors to the revitalization of Marxism—Lukács, Gramsci, Bloch, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty—they were influenced at an early stage in their careers by more subjectivist, even Idealist philosophies. Horkheimer, who set the tone for all of the Institut's work, had been interested in Schopenhauer and Kant before becoming fascinated with Hegel and Marx. His first published work was an analysis of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* written for his *Habilitation* under Hans Cornelius in 1925.⁷

Horkheimer's reading of Kant helped increase his sensitivity to the importance of individuality as a value never to be submerged entirely under the demands of the totality. It also heightened his appreciation of the intentional elements in cognition and thus prevented his acceptance of the "copy theory" of perception advocated by more orthodox Marxists. What it did not do, however, was to convince him of the inevitability of those dualisms—phenomena and noumena, pure and practical reason, etc.—that Kant had posited as insurmountable. In concluding his study, Horkheimer made it clear that although these splits had not yet been overcome, he saw no necessary reason why this could not be done. Kant's fundamental duality between will and knowledge, practical and pure reason, could and must be reconciled. In so arguing, Horkheimer demonstrated the impact of Hegel's critique of Kant on his own interpretation. Like Hegel, he saw cognitive knowledge and normative imperatives as ultimately inseparable.

Because of this and other similarities with Hegel on such questions as the nature of reason, the importance of dialectics, and the existence of a substantive logic, it is tempting to characterize Critical Theory as no more than a Hegelianized Marxism. And yet, on several fundamental issues, Horkheimer always maintained a certain distance from Hegel. Most basic was his rejection of

Hegel's metaphysical intentions and his claim to absolute truth. "I do not know," he wrote in *Dämmerung*, "how far metaphysicians are correct; perhaps somewhere there is a particularly compelling metaphysical system or fragment. But I do know that metaphysicians are usually impressed only to the smallest degree by what men suffer."⁸ Moreover, a system that tolerates every opposing view as part of the "total truth" inevitably has quietistic implications. An all-embracing system like Hegel's might well serve as a theodicy justifying the status quo. In fact, to the extent that Marxism had been ossified into a system claiming the key to truth, it too had fallen a victim to the same malady. The true object of Marxism, he argued, was not the uncovering of immutable truths, but the fostering of social change.

Elsewhere,⁹ Horkheimer outlined his other objections to Hegel's metaphysics. His strongest criticism was reserved for what is perhaps the fundamental tenet of Hegel's thought: the assumption that all knowledge is self-knowledge of the infinite subject—in other words, that an identity exists between subject and object, mind and matter, based on the ultimate primacy of the absolute subject. "Spirit," he wrote, "may not recognize itself either in nature or in history because, even if the spirit is not a questionable abstraction, it would not be identical with reality."¹⁰ In fact, there is no "thought" as such, only the specific thought of concrete men rooted in their socio-economic conditions. Nor is there "being" as such, but rather a "manifold of beings in the world."

To Horkheimer, all absolutes, all identity theories were suspect. Even the ideal of absolute justice contained in religion, he was later to argue, has a chimerical quality. The image of complete justice "can never be realized in history because even when a better society replaces the present disorder and is developed, past misery would not be made good and the suffering of surrounding nature not transcended."¹¹ As a result, philosophy, as he understood it, always expresses an unavoidable note of sadness, but without succumbing to resignation.

Yet, although Horkheimer attacked Hegel's identity theory, he felt that nineteenth century criticisms of a similar nature had been carried too far. In rejecting the ontological claims Hegel had made for his philosophy of Absolute Spirit, the positivists had robbed the intellect of any right to judge what was actual as true or false. Their overly empirical bias led to the apotheosis of facts in a way which was equally one-sided. From the first, Horkheimer consist-

ently rejected the Hobson's choice of metaphysical systematization or antinomian empiricism. Instead, he argued for the possibility of a dialectical social science that would avoid an identity theory and yet preserve the right of the observer to go beyond the givens of his experience. It was in large measure this refusal to succumb to the temptations of either alternative that gave Critical Theory its cutting edge.

Horkheimer's hostility to metaphysics was partly a reaction to the sclerosis of Marxism produced by its transformation into a body of received truths. But beyond this, it reflected the influence of his readings in non-Hegelian and non-Marxist philosophy. Schopenhauer's extreme skepticism over the possibility of reconciling reason with the world of will certainly had its effect. More important still was the impact of three late nineteenth-century thinkers, Nietzsche, Dilthey, and Bergson, all of whom had emphasized the relation of thought to human life.

To Horkheimer,¹² the *Lebensphilosophie* they helped create had expressed a legitimate protest against the growing rigidity of abstract rationalism and the concomitant standardization of individual existence which characterized life under advanced capitalism. It had pointed an accusing finger at the gap between the promises of bourgeois ideology and the reality of everyday life in bourgeois society. The development of the philosophy of life, he argued, corresponded to a fundamental change in capitalism itself. The earlier optimistic belief of certain Classical Idealists in the unity of reason and reality had expressed the individual entrepreneur's acceptance of harmony between his own activities and the functioning of the economy as a whole. The erosion of that conviction corresponded to the growth of monopoly capitalism in the late nineteenth century in which the individual's role was less harmonized with the totality than destroyed by it. *Lebensphilosophie* was basically a cry of outrage against this change. Because of this critical element, Horkheimer was careful to distinguish the "irrationalism" of the philosophers of life from that of their twentieth-century vulgarizers.

In making this distinction, Horkheimer broke with the tradition of hostility towards *Lebensphilosophie* maintained by almost all Marxist thinkers, including the later Lukács.¹³ In addition to his approval of its antisystematic strain, Horkheimer gave qualified approval to Dilthey's and Nietzsche's emphasis on the individual and on the importance of individual psychology for an

understanding of history. While their own psychological work was less subtle than the psychoanalysis he hoped to integrate with Critical Theory, he considered it far more useful than the bankrupt utilitarianism that informed liberalism and vulgar Marxism. He was especially impressed by Nietzsche's critique of the masochistic quality of bourgeois morality and saw in his work one of the foundation stones for the analysis of mass culture that was to occupy the Institut in the years to come.

Horkheimer's attitude towards *Lebensphilosophie*, however, was by no means uncritical. In his various writings on Dilthey, Bergson, and Nietzsche, three major criticisms emerged. By examining these in some detail, we can better understand the foundations of Critical Theory. First, although the philosophers of life had been correct in trying to rescue the individual from the threats of modern society, they had gone too far in emphasizing subjectivity and inwardness. In so doing, they had minimized the importance of action in the historical world. Second, with an occasional exception such as Nietzsche's critique of asceticism, they tended to neglect the material dimension of reality. Third and perhaps most important, in criticizing the degeneration of bourgeois rationalism into its abstract and formal aspects, they sometimes overstate their case and seemed to be rejecting reason itself. This ultimately led to the completely mindless irrationalism of their twentieth-century vulgarizers.

As might be expected, Horkheimer's interest in the question of bourgeois individualism led him back to a consideration of Kant and the origins of *Innerlichkeit* (inwardness).¹⁴ Among the dualistic elements in Kant's philosophy, he noted, was the gap between duty and interest. Individual morality, discovered by practical reason, was internalized and divorced from public ethics. Here Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*, with its emphasis on bridging the public-private opposition, was superior to Kant's *Moralität*. Despite this, Kant's view was closer to a correct reflection of conditions in the early nineteenth century. For to assume that a harmony could exist at that time between personal morality and public ethics, or between self-interest and a universal moral code, was to ignore the real irrationality of the external order. Where Kant had been wrong, however, was in hypostatizing these contradictions as immutable. By absolutizing the distinction between the individual and society, Kant had made a natural condition out of what was only historically valid, thereby unwittingly affirming the status quo. This was also a failing of the *Lebensphilosophen*. In

later years, however, Horkheimer and the other members of the Frankfurt School came to believe that the real danger lay not with those who overemphasized subjectivity and individuality, but rather with those who sought to eliminate them entirely under the banner of a false totalism. This fear went so far that Adorno would later write (in a frequently quoted phrase from *Minima Moralia*) that "The whole is the untrue."¹⁵ In the 1930s, however, Horkheimer and his colleagues were still concerned with the overemphasis on individuality that they detected in bourgeois thinkers from Kant to the philosophers of life.

Horkheimer's second major objection to Nietzsche, Dilthey, and Bergson was, as noted previously, that they were really hidden Idealists. In contrast, Horkheimer proposed a materialist theory of society, but one which was very clearly distinguished from the putative materialism of vulgar Marxism. In one of his most important essays in the *Zeitschrift*, "Materialismus und Metaphysik,"¹⁶ he set out to rescue materialism from those who saw it simply as an antonym of spiritualism and a denial of nonmaterial existence. True materialism, he argued, did not mean a new type of monistic metaphysics based on the ontological primacy of matter. In this nineteenth-century mechanical materialists like Vogt and Haeckel had been wrong, as were Marxists who made a fetish of the supposedly "objective," material world. Equally erroneous was the hypostatization of the eternal primacy of the economic substructure of society. Both substructure and superstructure interact at all times, although it was true that under capitalism the economic base played a crucial role in this process. What had to be understood, however, was that this condition was only historical and would change with time. In fact, it was one of the characteristics of twentieth-century society that politics was beginning to assert an autonomy beyond anything Marx had predicted.

Horkheimer also disliked the tendency of vulgar Marxists to elevate materialism to a theory of knowledge that claimed absolute certainty in the way Idealism had in the past. In fact, to argue that a materialist epistemology could exhaustively explain reality was to invite that urge to dominate the world most vividly displayed in Fichtean Idealism. This was borne out by the fact that monistic materialism as far back as Hobbes had led to a manipulative, dominating attitude toward nature. This scheme of man's domination of nature, it might be added parenthetically, was to become a central concern of the Frankfurt School in subsequent years.

Despite the impossibility of absolute knowledge, Horkheimer

held that materialism must not succumb to relativistic resignation. In fact, the monistic materialist epistemology of vulgar Marxism had been too passive. Echoing Marx's critique of Feuerbach almost a century before, Horkheimer stressed the active element in cognition that Idealism had correctly affirmed. The objects of perception, he argued, are themselves the product of man's actions, although the relationship tends to be masked by reification. Indeed, nature itself has an historical element in the dual sense that man conceives of it differently at different times and actively works changes in it. True materialism, he contended, is thus dialectical, involving an on-going process of interaction between subject and object. Here Horkheimer returned once again to the Hegelian roots of Marxism, which had been obscured in the intervening century. Like Marx, but unlike many self-proclaimed Marxists, he refused to make a fetish of dialectics as an objective process outside of man's control. Nor did he see it as a methodological construct imposed like a Weberian ideal type on a chaotic manifold. Dialectics probed the "force-field," to use an expression of Adorno's,¹⁷ between consciousness and being, subject and object. It did not, indeed, could not, pretend to have discovered ontological first principles. It rejected the extremes of nominalism and realism and remained willing to operate in a perpetual state of suspended judgment.

Hence, the crucial importance of mediation (*Vermittlung*) for a correct theory of society. No facet of social reality could be understood by the observer as final or complete in itself. There were no social "facts," as the positivists believed, forming the substratum of a social theory. Instead, there was a constant interplay of the particular and universal, of "moment" and totality. Moreover, the relationship was reciprocal. Vulgar Marxists had been mistaken in seeking a reductionist derivation of superstructural phenomena from their substructural base. Culture, Horkheimer and his colleagues argued, was never epiphenomenal, although it was never fully autonomous. Its relationship to the material substructure of society was multidimensional. All cultural phenomena must be seen as mediated through the social totality, not merely as the reflection of class interests. This meant that they also expressed the status quo. Nothing, or at least almost nothing, was solely ideological.¹⁸

In so arguing, it might be added, Horkheimer was closer to Marx himself than the *soi-disant* Marxists who claimed orthodoxy.

When discussing the bourgeois state, for example, Marx had not interpreted it solely as the “executive committee of the ruling class,” but also as an adumbration, albeit distorted, of the universalistic reconciliation of contradictions that the triumph of the proletariat was to bring about. Similarly, Engels, when discussing realism in literature, had shown an appreciation for the progressive elements in ostensibly reactionary writers like Balzac because of their ability to portray the concrete totality with all its contradictions. The Institut’s extensive work on aesthetic and cultural matters was rooted in the same assumption.

In stressing the totality, Horkheimer correspondingly criticized other social theorists for concentrating on one facet of reality to the exclusion of the others. This led to one of the methodological fallacies the Frankfurt School most frequently attacked: fetishization. More orthodox Marxists within the Institut, such as the economist Henryk Grossmann, were always criticized for their overemphasis on the material substructure of society. The composition of the Institut, with its deliberate diversification of fields, reflected the importance Critical Theory placed on the totality of dialectical mediations, which had to be grasped in the process of analyzing society.

Horkheimer’s stress on dialectics also extended to his understanding of logic. Although rejecting the extravagant ontological claims Hegel had made for his logical categories, he agreed with the need for a substantive, rather than merely formal logic. Formalism, characteristic of bourgeois law (the ideal of the *Rechtstaat*), bourgeois morality (the categorical imperative), and bourgeois logic had once been progressive, but now served only to perpetuate the status quo. True logic, as well as true rationalism, must go beyond form to include substantive elements as well.

And yet, precisely what these substantive elements were was difficult to say. The agnosticism in Horkheimer’s notion of materialism also extended to his views on the possibility of a philosophical anthropology. He dismissed the efforts of his former colleague at Frankfurt, Max Scheler, to discover a constant human nature as being no more than a desperate search for absolute meaning in a relativist world.¹⁹ The yearning of phenomenologists for the security of eternal essences was a source of self-delusion, a point Adorno and Marcuse were to echo in their respective critiques of Husserl and Scheler.²⁰

Accordingly, Critical Theory denied the necessity, or even the

possibility, of formulating a definitive description of "socialist man." This dislike of anthropological speculation has been attributed by some commentators to the residual influence of scientific socialism.²¹ But in view of Horkheimer's hostility to the reduction of philosophy to science, this seems a less than satisfactory explanation. A more likely reason is the subterranean influence of religion on the secularized thinkers of the Frankfurt School. As Horkheimer later acknowledged,²² the traditional Jewish prohibition on naming or describing God and paradise was reproduced in Critical Theory's refusal to give substance to its utopian vision. It was no accident that Adorno chose music, the most non-representational of aesthetic modes, as the medium through which he explored bourgeois culture and sought signs of its negation. Of the major figures connected with the Institut only Marcuse attempted to articulate a positive anthropology at certain times in his career.²³

And yet, even in Horkheimer's work there appeared a kind of negative anthropology, an implicit but still powerful presence. Although to some extent rooted in Freud, its primary origins could be found in the work of Marx. In discussing Feuerbach's attempt to construct an explicit picture of human nature, Marx had attacked its atemporal, abstract, antihistorical premises. The only constant, he argued, was man's ability to create himself anew. "Anthropogenesis," to use a later commentator's term,²⁴ was the only human nature Marx allowed. With this Horkheimer was in agreement; the good society was one in which man was free to act as a subject rather than be acted upon as a contingent predicate.

When Marx seemed to go further in defining the categories of human self-production in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Horkheimer drew back. The central position of labor in Marx's work and his concomitant stress on the problem of alienated labor in capitalist society played a relatively minor role in Horkheimer's writings. In *Dämmung*, he wrote, "To make labor into a transcendent category of human activity is an ascetic ideology. . . . Because socialists hold to this general concept, they make themselves into carriers of capitalist propaganda."²⁵

Horkheimer's antagonism to the fetishization of labor expressed another dimension of his materialism: the demand for human, sensual happiness. In one of his most trenchant essays,

"Egoismus und Freiheitsbewegung,"²⁶ he discussed the hostility to personal gratification inherent in bourgeois culture. Despite the utilitarianism of a Bentham or a Mandeville, the characteristic ideology of the early bourgeois era was Kantian. Seeing no unity between individual interest and public morality, Kant had posited an inevitable distinction between happiness and duty. Although he gave a certain weight to both, by the time capitalism had become sufficiently advanced, the precedence of duty to the totality over personal gratification had grown to such an extent that the latter was almost completely neglected. To compensate for the repression of genuine individual happiness, mass diversions had been devised to defuse discontent. Much of the Institut's later work on the "Culture Industry" was designed to show how effective these palliatives were.

But even allegedly revolutionary movements, Horkheimer contended, have perpetuated the characteristic bourgeois hostility to happiness. The fourteenth-century Romans under Cola di Rienzi and the Florentines in the time of Savonarola were two clear examples of revolutionary movements that ended by opposing individual happiness in the name of some higher good. Even more strikingly, the French Revolution and especially the Terror illustrated this theme. Robespierre, like di Rienzi and Savonarola, confused love for the people with their ruthless repression. The equality brought by the revolution, Horkheimer noted, was the negative leveling of the guillotine, an equality of degradation rather than dignity. In the twentieth century, a similar phenomenon had appeared in fascism. The *Führer* expressed in the extreme the typical bourgeois combination of romantic sentimentality and utter ruthlessness. The ideology of duty and service to the totality at the cost of individual happiness attained its ultimate expression in Fascist rhetoric. The revolutionary pretensions of the Fascists were no more than a fraud designed to perpetuate the domination of the ruling classes.

In contrast to the bourgeois ethic of self-abnegation, Horkheimer upheld the dignity of egoism. During the Enlightenment, Helvetius and de Sade had expressed a protest, however distorted, against asceticism in the name of a higher morality. Even more forcefully, Nietzsche had exposed the connection between self-denial and *ressentiment* implicit in most of Western culture. Where Horkheimer differed from them, however, was in his stress of the social component in human happiness. His egoistic

individual, unlike the utilitarians' or even Nietzsche's, always realized his greatest gratification through communal interaction. In fact, Horkheimer constantly challenged the reification of individual and society as polar opposites, just as he denied the mutual exclusivity of subject and object in philosophy.

The Institut's stress on personal happiness as an integral element in its materialism was further developed by Marcuse in an article he wrote for the *Zeitschrift* in 1938, "Zur Kritik des Hedonismus."²⁷ In contrast to Hegel, who "fought against eudaemonism in the interest of historical progress," Marcuse defended hedonistic philosophies for preserving a "moment" of truth in their stress on happiness. Where they traditionally went wrong, however, was in their unquestioning acceptance of the competitive individual as the model of highest personal development. True happiness could only be achieved when freedom was universally attained. "The reality of happiness," he wrote, "is the reality of freedom as the self-determination of liberated humanity in its common struggle with nature." And since freedom was synonymous with the realization of rationality, "in their completed form both, happiness and reason, coincide." What Marcuse was advocating here was that convergence of particular and general interests usually known as "positive freedom." Individual happiness was one moment in the totality of positive freedom; reason was the other.

The Frankfurt School's stress on reason was one of the cornerstones of its work. Here its debt to Hegel was most clearly demonstrated. Horkheimer's third major objection to *Lebensphilosophie*, it will be recalled, was to its overreaction to the deterioration of rationality, which had led to the rejection of reason as such. As Horkheimer would repeat over and over again during his career, rationality was at the root of any progressive social theory. What he meant by reason, however, was not easily grasped by those unschooled in the traditions of classical German philosophy. Horkheimer referred, more often than not implicitly, to the Idealists' distinction between *Verstand* (Understanding) and *Vernunft* (Reason). By *Verstand*, Kant and Hegel had meant a lower faculty of the mind that structured the phenomenal world in a common-sensical way. *Vernunft*, on the other hand, signified a faculty which went beyond mere appearances to a deeper reality. Although Kant differed from Hegel in rejecting the possibility of reconciling the world of phenomena with the

transcendent noumenal sphere, he shared Hegel's belief in the ontological priority of *Vernunft* over *Verstand*. Of all the Institut's members, Marcuse was perhaps most drawn to the classical notion of reason. In 1937 he attempted to define it and turn it in a materialist direction in the following way:

Reason is the fundamental category of philosophical thought, the only one by means of which it has bound itself to human destiny. Philosophy wanted to discover the ultimate and most general grounds of Being. Under the name of reason it conceived the idea of an authentic Being in which all significant antitheses (of subject and object, essence and appearance, thought and being) were reconciled. Connected with this idea was the conviction that what exists is not immediately and already rational but must rather be brought to reason. . . . As the given world was bound up with rational thought and, indeed, ontologically dependent on it, all that contradicted reason or was not rational was posited as something that had to be overcome. Reason was established as a critical tribunal.²⁸

Here Marcuse seemed to be arguing for an identity theory that contrasted sharply with the Frankfurt School's general stress on nonidentity. In fact, the aversion to identity was far fainter in Marcuse's writings than in Horkheimer's or Adorno's.²⁹ Still, in their work as well, the sanctity of reason and the reconciliation it implied always appeared as a utopian ideal. Jews, after all, may be prohibited from naming or describing God, but they do not deny his existence. In all of the Institut's writings, the standard was a society made rational in the sense that German philosophy had traditionally defined that term. Reason, as the passage above indicates, was the "critical tribunal" on which Critical Theory primarily was based. The irrationality of the current society was always challenged by the "negative" possibility of a truly rational alternative.

If Horkheimer was reluctant to affirm the complete identity of subject and object, he was even more certain in rejecting their strict dualistic opposition, which Descartes had bequeathed to modern thought. Implicit in the Cartesian legacy, he argued, was the reduction of reason to its subjective dimension. This was the first step in driving rationality away from the world and into contemplative inwardness. It led to an eternal separation of essence and appearance, which fostered the noncritical acceptance of the status quo. As a result, rationality increasingly came to be

identified with the common sense of *Verstand* instead of the more ambitiously synthetic *Vernunft*. In fact, the late nineteenth-century irrationalists' attack on reason had been aimed primarily at its reduction to the analytical, formal, and divisive *Verstand*. This was a criticism Horkheimer could share, although he did not reject analytical rationality out of hand. "Without definiteness and the order of concepts, without *Verstand*," he wrote, "there is not thought, also no dialectic."³⁰ Even Hegel's dialectical logic, which Critical Theory embraced, did not simply negate formal logic. The Hegelian *aufheben* meant preservation as well as transcendence and cancellation. What Horkheimer did reject was the complete identification of reason and logic with the limited power of *Verstand*.

Throughout its history, the Institut carried on a spirited defense of reason on two fronts. In addition to the attack of the irrationalists, which by the twentieth century had degenerated into outright obscurantist mindlessness, another, perhaps more serious threat was posed from a different quarter. With the breakdown of the Hegelian synthesis in the second half of the nineteenth century, a new stress on empirically derived social science had developed alongside the increasing domination of natural science over men's lives. Positivism, or scientism, as it has sometimes been called, denied the validity of the traditional idea of reason as *Vernunft*, which it dismissed as empty metaphysics. At the time of the Frankfurt School, the most significant proponents of this point of view were the Logical Positivists of the Vienna Circle, who were forced to emigrate to the United States at about the same time. In America, their impact was far greater than the Institut's because of the congruence of their ideas with the basic traditions of American philosophy. In later years, Horkheimer took pains to establish the similarities between such native schools as pragmatism and logical positivism.³¹

His first major broadside against Logical Positivism came in 1937 in the *Zeitschrift*.³² Once again his sensitivity to the changing functions of a school of thought in different historical contexts was evident. Originally, he argued, empiricism as practiced by Locke and Hume contained a dynamic, even critical element in its insistence on the perception of the individual as the source of knowledge. The enlightenment empiricists had used their observations to undermine the prevailing social order. Contemporary Logical Positivism, on the other hand, had lost this subversive

quality because of its belief that knowledge, although initially derived from perception, was really concerned with judgments about that perception contained in so-called "protocol sentences." By restricting reality to that which could be expressed in such sentences, the unspeakable was excluded from the philosopher's domain. But even more fundamentally, the general empiricist stress on perception ignored the intentional element in all cognition. Positivism of all kinds was ultimately the abdication of reflection. The result was the absolutizing of facticity and the reification of the existing order.

In addition to his distaste for their fetishism of facts, Horkheimer further objected to the Logical Positivists' reliance on formal logic to the exclusion of a substantive alternative. To see logic as an analogue of mathematics, he held, was to reduce it to tautologies with no real meaning in the historical world. The conviction that all true knowledge aspired to the condition of scientific, mathematic conceptualization was a surrender to a metaphysics as bad as the one positivists had set out to refute.

What was perhaps worst of all in Horkheimer's eyes was the positivists' pretension to have disentangled facts from values. Here he detected a falling away from the original Enlightenment position of using empiricism as a partisan weapon against the mystifications of superstition and tradition. A society, he argued, might itself be "possessed" and thus produce "facts" that were themselves "insane." Because it had no way to evaluate this possibility, modern empiricism capitulated before the authority of the status quo, despite its intentions. The members of the Vienna Circle might be progressive in their politics, but this was in no way related to their philosophy. Their surrender to the mystique of the prevailing reality, however, was not arbitrary; rather it was an expression of the contingency of existence in a society that administered and manipulated men's lives. As man must reestablish his ability to control his own destiny, so must reason be restored to its proper place as the arbiter of ends, not merely means. *Vernunft* must regain the field from which it had been driven by the triumph of *Verstand*.

What made Horkheimer's stress on reason so problematical was his equally strong antimetaphysical bias. Reality had to be judged by the "tribunal of reason," but reason was not to be taken as a transcendent ideal, existing outside of history. Truth, Horkheimer and his colleagues always insisted, was not immutable.

And yet, to deny the absoluteness of truth was not to succumb to relativism, epistemological, ethical, or otherwise. The dichotomy of absolutism and relativism was in fact a false one. Each period of time has its own truth, Horkheimer argued, although there is none above time. What is true is whatever fosters social change in the direction of a rational society. This, of course, once again raised the question of what was meant by reason, the definition of which Critical Theory never attempted to give explicitly. Dialectics was superb at attacking other systems' pretensions to truth, but when it came to articulating the ground of its own assumptions and values, it fared less well. Like its negative anthropology, Critical Theory had a basically insubstantial concept of reason and truth, rooted in social conditions and yet outside of them, connected with *praxis*, yet keeping its distance from it.

Praxis and reason were, in fact, the two poles of Critical Theory, as they had been for the Left Hegelians a century before. The interplay and tension between them contributed greatly to its dialectical suggestiveness, although the primacy of rational theory was never in doubt. As Marcuse wrote in *Reason and Revolution*, speaking for the entire Frankfurt School, "Theory will preserve the truth even if revolutionary practice deviates from its proper path. Practice follows the truth, not vice versa."³³ Still, the importance of self-determined activity, of "anthropogenesis," was constantly emphasized in the Institut's earlier writings. Here the influence of *Lebensphilosophie* on Horkheimer and his colleagues was crucial, although they always understood true *praxis* as a collective endeavor. The stress on *praxis* accorded well with the Frankfurt School's rejection of Hegel's identity theory. In the spaces created by the irreducible mediations between subject and object, particular and universal, human freedom might be sustained. In fact, what alarmed the Frankfurt School so much in later years was the progressive liquidation of these very areas of human spontaneity in Western society.

The other antipode of Critical Theory, the utopian reconciliation of subject and object, essence and appearance, particular and universal, had very different connotations. *Vernunft* implied an objective reason that was not solely constituted by the subjective acts of individual men. Although transformed from a philosophical ideal into a social one, it still bore traces of its metaphysical origins. Vulgar Marxism had allowed these tendencies

cies to reemerge in the monistic materialism that the Institut never tired of attacking. And yet, as we have seen, even in Critical Theory there was an implicit negative metaphysics and negative anthropology—negative in the sense of refusing to define itself in any fixed way, thus adhering to Nietzsche's dictum that a "great truth wants to be criticized, not idolized."

As thinkers in the tradition of "positive freedom," which included Plato, Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx, they were caught in the basic dilemma that dogged the tradition from its inception. As Hannah Arendt has pointed out,³⁴ the notion of positive freedom contained an inherent conflict between the Greek political experience and the subsequent attempts of Greek philosophers to make sense of it. From the former came the identification of freedom with human acts and human speech, in short, with *praxis*. From the latter came its equation with that authentic being, which was reason. Attempts at an *Aufhebung* have been made ever since. The subtlety and richness of the Institut's effort mark it as one of the most fruitful, even though it, too, ultimately met with failure.

In the Institut's later years, the tension between the demand for *praxis* and the realization that rational theory could offer no guidelines for its direction was to grow. During the war the historical choice seemed to lie between the victory of barbarism or the "beginning of history" that Marx had foretold.³⁵ But once barbarism, or at least its Fascist variety, had been defeated without "history" really beginning, the Institut began to question the very possibility of rationally grounded *praxis*. Disillusioned with the Soviet Union, skeptical about the revolutionary potential of the working class in the West, Horkheimer and Adorno increasingly came to believe that rational theory was a form of critical *praxis* itself.³⁶ The last preserve of true negation, so it seemed in their gloomier moments, was thought alone, thought without any immediate realization in the world of human interaction.

The experience of the Institut's members in the United States doubtless contributed to this change. As émigrés, they were alienated from American mass culture. As rationalists in the Hegelian mold, they were appalled by the American tendency to equate reason with its instrumental, technological dimension. As radicals still in the Marxist tradition, they were distressed by the ability of American society to contain potential opposition. The very existence of areas of negation in what Marcuse was to pop-

ularize as “one-dimensional society” seemed threatened. In the face of so gloomy a prognosis, the role of the intellectual, as they understood it, was to act as a guardian of those traces of the “other” that still persisted. If this meant antagonizing those who would force revolution even though its social preconditions were not yet remotely in existence, they were willing to suffer their scorn. Irrational *praxis*, they concluded, was in some ways worse than no *praxis* at all. Critical Theory must remain true to its negative utopia in the hope that at some time to come, its realization might not be betrayed, as it had been so often in the past.

To be sure, the Institut had defined its role as nonactivist even in the 1920s and 1930s. This was the case, however, not because its members absolutized the distinction between “*Politik*” and “*Wissenschaft*” in the Weberian sense, but rather because they felt objective conditions were such that a division of labor was unavoidable. By the 1960s, the chances for the unification of theory and practice seemed even more remote. As a result, the Institut felt more justified than ever in confining its activities to speculation and research. However, by refining and popularizing the research methodology it had created in the 1930s,³⁷ it helped stir a heated debate among social scientists in Germany, which raised a number of crucial questions about the political and social implications of *Wissenschaft* itself.³⁸ This, rather than any specific imperative for *praxis*, was the major legacy of the Frankfurt School.

Paradoxically, the underlying assumptions of that methodology grew increasingly radical as the Institut’s stance on current political questions became more cautious. Marcuse’s recent assertion³⁹ that Marx had not been utopian enough was a continuation of a theme that played a crucial role in the Institut’s thinking after the end of the war. Marx himself had shared in the shortcomings of the Enlightenment tradition that Horkheimer and Adorno had subjected to their critical scrutiny in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. The failures of those acting in Marx’s name, indeed some of the horrors they perpetrated, were not unconnected, so they implied, with those inadequacies. Current political activists, however they may feel about the Frankfurt School’s retreat from *praxis*, would do well to ponder the reasons for the reversal. Radical theory may not necessarily lead to radical practice, a reflection less on the theorists than on the society in which they, like all of us, must somehow live.

Notes

1. Kierkegaard, *Konstruktion des Ästhetischen* (Tübingen, 1933) and *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie* (Stuttgart, 1956), most of which was written when Adorno was at Oxford from 1934 to 1937.
2. Herbert Marcuse, *Negations*, translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon, 1968).
3. Leo Lowenthal, *Literature and the Image of Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1957).
4. Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, translated by Samuel and Shierry Weber (London, 1967).
5. The title essay of *Marxismus und Philosophie* (Frankfurt, 1966), was published in the *Grünberg Archiv* in 1923.
6. Heinrich Regius, *Dämmerung* (Zurich, 1934).
7. Max Horkheimer, *Über Kants Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Frankfurt, 1925).
8. *Dämmerung*, p. 86.
9. Max Horkheimer, "Hegel und das Problem der Metaphysik," *Festschrift für Carl Grünberg* (Leipzig, 1932).
10. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
11. Max Horkheimer, "Gedanke zur Religion," *Kritische Theorie*, ed., Alfred Schmidt (Frankfurt, 1968), p. 375. The original appeared as "Wachbemerkung," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (1935).
12. Max Horkheimer, "Zur Rationalismusstreit in der gegenwärtigen Philosophie," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1934).
13. See Georg Lukács, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft in Werke*, vol. IX (Neuwied, 1961).
14. Max Horkheimer, "Materialismus und Moral," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, II, 2 (1933).
15. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (Frankfurt, 1951), p. 80.
16. Max Horkheimer, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1933).
17. Theodor W. Adorno, *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie* (Stuttgart, 1956), p. 82.
18. For a good example of this consideration in the Institut's work, see Adorno's article in *Prisms* on Veblen, where he discusses the concept of "conspicuous consumption" (p. 87).
19. Max Horkheimer, "Bemerkungen zur philosophischen Anthropologie," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1935).
20. Adorno, *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*; Marcuse "The Concept of Essence," *Negations*, translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston, 1968), originally, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1936).

21. Anonymous, "From Historicism to Marxist Humanism," *Times Literary Supplement* (June 5, 1969), p. 598.
22. In his "Über die deutschen Juden," *Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft* (Frankfurt, 1967), Horkheimer remarked that the Jewish refusal to name God was shared by Kant and Hegel as well (p. 311). He amplified on the importance of this influence on his own thinking in an interview he granted *Der Spiegel* (January 5, 1970).
23. See, for example, Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston, 1969), p. 7f.
24. Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge, 1968), p. 85.
25. Regius, *Dämmerung*, p. 181.
26. Max Horkheimer, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1936).
27. Herbert Marcuse, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1938); the article is reprinted in English in *Negations*.
28. Herbert Marcuse, "Philosophie und kritische Theorie," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, vol. 6, no. 3 (1937); also reprinted in *Negations*, where the quoted passage appears on pages 135–136.
29. For a discussion of the importance of identity theory in Marcuse's work, see my article "The Metapolitics of Utopianism," *Dissent* (July–August, 1970).
30. Max Horkheimer, "Zum Problem der Wahrheit," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 4, no. 3 (1935): 357.
31. Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York, 1957), passim.
32. Max Horkheimer, "Der neueste Angriff auf die Metaphysik," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1937).
33. Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* (New York, 1941), p. 322.
34. Hannah Arendt, "What Is Authority?," *Between Past and Future* (Cleveland and New York, 1961), p. 107.
35. This was the choice posited in Horkheimer's essay "Autoritärer Staat," *Walter Benjamin zum Gedächtnis* (Limited Publication, 1942).
36. The clearest expression of this came in Adorno's last major philosophical work, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt, 1966).
37. The most important statement of this came in Horkheimer's "Traditionelle und kritische Theorie," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1937).
38. For a recent summation of the debate in English, see the anonymous article "Dialectical Methodology: Marx or Weber; The New 'Methodenstreit' in Postwar German Philosophy," *Times Literary Supplement* (March 12, 1970).
39. Herbert Marcuse, *Essay on Liberation*, passim.

Walter Benjamin: Commodity Fetishism, the Modern, and the Experience of History*

Shierry M. Weber

Walter Benjamin wrote what might be called essays in the “cultural history” of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His aim, however, was to articulate the structure of modern experience and to define the possibilities for liberation within it. In this he is one of the twentieth-century Marxists who explored reification in objects and experience and who attempted to explode it through dialectical thought.

For Benjamin the defining characteristic of the modern period is the mass production of commodities, made possible by technological change and resulting in the destruction of tradition and the modes of experience dependent on it. This transformation of experience occurs on all levels, including those of perception and fantasy. As commodities, as objects of perception, and as materializations of fantasy, images and objects are the focus of Benjamin’s attention. Their role in the modern experience of history is a crucial issue for Benjamin, for his work is guided by an interest in liberation, and liberation presupposes

* This essay is dedicated to Donna Huse.

historical awareness of its imminence. Commodity fetishism and the destruction of tradition have created the illusion of eternal sameness instead of a liberation-oriented sense of history. For Benjamin, however, the modern experience need not be one of reification. The destruction of tradition opens up possibilities for liberation which capitalism obscures and opposes. The aim of Benjamin's work is to create the blast of light that will flip the utopian side of the modern into view.

My concern in this essay is to present some of the substance of the above statements. I will do this by focusing on some of Benjamin's most important texts, beginning with his conception of the relation between awareness of history and interest in liberation, and then moving to his analysis of the nature of the modern.

The first impression Benjamin's writings make is one of brilliance, eccentricity, and fragmentariness. This impression derives partly from the circumstances of his life—financial pressures that led him to take up journalism and the circumstances that led to his early death with his major work unfinished—but also, and more importantly, from his style of thought and writing. Benjamin's writings are not straightforward expositions of social and political theory, but are what he called “dialectical images.” He approached his subjects as constellations of meaning to be exploded and reassembled into new constellations. As I shall attempt to show, both his dialectic and his images have great coherence. But first a few essential biographical and bibliographical facts. Benjamin was born into a wealthy Jewish family in Berlin in 1892. He studied philosophy and literature in the 1910s and 1920s. In continual financial difficulty, he tried for a university position in German literature in Frankfurt but was rejected. For years he was interested in both Jewish studies and activist radical politics, but he was unable to commit himself ultimately to either. He always planned to learn Hebrew and emigrate to Palestine, but he never did; and his relations with Marxism took the form of intellectual concern rather than engagement with the Party. Friendships played important roles in these interests: in the first case, with Gershom Scholem, in the second with Bertolt Brecht. Theodor Adorno and Ernst Bloch also belonged to his circle of friends. After the Nazi seizure of power he emigrated to Paris, where he worked on the major project he called the Paris Arcades project, his study of the nineteenth century. He also received some financial support as

a contributor to the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, the Frankfurt school's publication. In 1940 he finally left Paris for the United States, but he was detained at the French-Spanish border and, fearing being handed over to the Gestapo, committed suicide.

Benjamin's work begins with writings on German literature and on the philosophy of language—on Hölderlin, German romanticism, Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, German baroque tragedy, and language and translation. The rest of his work includes a number of shorter pieces on nineteenth- and twentieth-century German, French, and Russian authors, among them Feodor Dostoevsky, Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka, and Bertolt Brecht; two books and numerous short pieces consisting of memoirs, aphorisms, reflections, and descriptions of cities; and works that are part of the Arcades project. These include a long essay on Charles Baudelaire, the "Theses on the Philosophy of History," and the reflections on film and photography entitled "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." It is primarily this last portion of Benjamin's work that I will discuss in this essay.

I. Benjamin's Conception of History¹

Benjamin planned the "Theses on the Philosophy of History" as an epistemological preface to the Paris Arcades project, his study of the nineteenth century.² The "Theses" justify the study of the past by showing how the interests of liberation impel one to the kind of historical knowledge represented by the Arcades project. This concern with the connection between knowledge and interest, which is equivalent to a concern with the nature of dialectical thought, links Benjamin to the Frankfurt school—to Marcuse's conception of the relation between materialism and idealism, to Adorno's negative dialectic, and to Jürgen Habermas' conception of emancipatory knowledge.

Benjamin represents the connection between knowledge and interest in emancipation as an alliance between theology and historical liberation. In this attempt to tap Messianic impulses for historical liberation, his work is akin to that of Ernst Bloch. Benjamin presents this alliance with some irony; the theology to which he refers is Jewish Messianism, and the sense in which it is valid for us is that each generation "has been endowed with a weak Messianic power."³ The aim of the "Theses" is to show, on

the one hand, that historical materialism makes sense only if one recognizes the Messianic moments implicit in its conception of history, and, on the other, that historical materialism, thus understood, would have the intention toward the past described in the "Theses," the intention of redemption.

The first Thesis simply announces that, contrary to prevailing misconceptions and intellectual taboos, historical materialism is not an autonomous and infallible scientific system but a kind of knowledge dependent on a guiding interest:

The story is told of an automaton constructed in such a way that it could play a winning game of chess, answering each move of an opponent with a countermove. A puppet in Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent from all sides. Actually, a little hunchback who was an expert chess player sat inside and guided the puppet's hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophical counterpart to this device. The puppet called "historical materialism" is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight.⁴

The alliance of historical materialism with theology means, first, that history may not be conceived apart from the possibilities of liberation or redemption, and, second, it implies an integration of discontinuity and continuity—the discontinuity with history inherent in religion and the commitment to continuity inherent in politics. Benjamin develops these points in a short untranslated piece called "Theological-political Fragment."⁵ The Kingdom of God, the goal of Messianism, is by nature outside of history, he says; it is to be realized through an apocalyptic break with the continuum of history. It cannot, therefore, be made the goal of history. The Messianic break with history draws on the energy of intense suffering. The goal of history, in contrast, is happiness, extended and realized in time. Nevertheless, Benjamin argues, the Messianic and the political (historical) orders are not at odds with one another, for happiness itself is indissolubly bound up with transience:

To the spiritual *restitutio in integrum* which leads into immortality corresponds an earthly one which leads into the eternity of passing away

[*Untergang*], and the rhythm of this eternal passing in its totality, in its spatial but also temporal totality, is happiness. For nature is messianic by virtue of its eternal and total transience.⁶

Happiness occurs in what is transient, but what is transient has unique historical existence—it is concrete. Consequently, although politics is committed to realizing a social order that will provide happiness, this does not mean that its attention is directed solely to the future. The concrete is what is in the past and present. The desire for happiness, which is the driving force of politics, expresses itself in the attempt to liberate the concrete by transforming the intensity of suffering into one of happiness. This liberation, which utilizes a Messianic intensity of negation, Benjamin calls redemption. In the second Thesis he quotes Lotze, who remarks “the freedom from envy which the present displays toward the future.” Benjamin comments:

Reflection shows us that our image of happiness is thoroughly colored by the time to which the course of our own existence has assigned us. The kind of happiness that could arouse envy in us exists only in the air we have breathed, among people we could have talked to, women who could have given themselves to us. In other words, our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption.⁷

Thus the political project of liberation consists simultaneously in the negation of suffering and oppression and the redemption of what is and what has been. Or, to use a Marxist image, the strength of the working class, its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, “are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren.”⁸

To be aware of the possibility of liberation one must be aware of the constant catastrophe of nonliberation. As the image of the chess game in the first Thesis indicates, history is a game that may be won or lost. What is past is still in danger, but it is also still open to redemption; these are the stakes in the study of history. The past lives in relation to us; if we turn to it impelled by the interest of liberation, it is both to redeem it, and for our own sake:

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it “the way it was” (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up

at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of the Antichrist. Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.⁹

Conversely, part of our danger, the danger in which we turn to the past, is that of being cut off from our past. We need a past; we cannot be unique, specific, concrete without one. When we reject our past because it is tainted with oppression, we are admitting the total and final victory of the enemy over a part of ourselves. However, Benjamin asserts, the continuity of history as we commonly conceive it is a construction by the enemy, one which we can explode and thereby regain the authentic past:

A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past—which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has the past become citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a *citation à l'ordre du jour*—and that day is Judgment Day.¹⁰

The image of Judgment Day and the theme of redemption indicate that Benjamin is a utopian. For him as for Marcuse, the question “socialism, scientific, or utopian?” is a living one. But the utopianism of Marcuse and that of Benjamin focus on different aspects of the same process: Marcuse’s strategy is to free the interests, desires, and needs that impel us to liberation; Benjamin’s is to renew the sense of history by invoking the vision of the redeemed past and present. For neither does utopianism consist of making blueprints for the future, though the forces they aim at releasing will realize the future. Benjamin’s aim is to concentrate energies in the present and thus establish “a conception of the present as the ‘time of the now’ [Jetztzeit] which

is shot through with chips of Messianic time.”¹¹ This concentration on the present and past is the essence of Messianism’s contribution to politics, and it is the subject of the last Thesis:

We know that the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future. The Torah and the prayers instruct them in remembrance, however. This stripped the future of its magic, to which all those succumb who turn to the soothsayers for enlightenment. This does not imply, however, that for the Jews the future turned into homogeneous, empty time. For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter.¹²

Benjamin opposes his conception of messianic time to the prevailing modern conception of history as an empty, homogeneous flow of time. The claim put forth by the nineteenth-century historicist school, that one can and must see the past exactly as it was, not in relation to the present and without any evaluation (“all epochs are equally close to God,” Ranke), on the one hand, and the belief in historical progress that characterized the Social Democratic Party’s political outlook, on the other hand, are essentially the same in that they focus in an abstract way on the fact that time passes. “The concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time,”¹³ and “historicism rightly culminates in universal history. . . . Universal history has no theoretical armature. Its method is additive; it musters a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time.”¹⁴ This view of history obscures our (weak) messianic power by implicitly rendering all things identical and thus destroying the concrete and the possibility of its redemption. The possibility of redemption cannot be envisioned within the perspective of this view of history. It robs us both of our awareness of danger and of our desire for something different. It thus reduces us to impotence:

The historical materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called “Once upon a time” in historicism’s bordello. He remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history.¹⁵

The image of a concentration of energy that functions as an explosive power is one of Benjamin’s central images for dialectical

thought, historical knowledge, and revolutionary action. Power is power to stop the flow of time, to introduce discontinuity into the empty continuum of history. Benjamin recounts an anecdote about workers destroying clocks in the July Revolution in France, and he says of the study of history:

Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history—blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework.¹⁶

Dialectical thought as a method of liberation has both a destructive and a constructive moment. It acts destructively to break up an oppressive continuum and arrest the homogeneous flow of time, but simultaneously it constructs configurations in which the concrete can exist in its uniqueness. Those configurations bring the past and the present into relation with one another: the materialist historian “stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one.”¹⁷ Benjamin’s use of quotations provides an example of this process. Each moment of the past is, ideally, to become a quotation, a “*citation à l’ordre du jour*,” as Benjamin said in the third Thesis. It is to be removed from its previous context and become part of a new context infused with the intention of the writer in the present, while at the same time preserving its own integrity. Benjamin’s ultimate intention for the Arcades project was that the work should consist entirely of quotations.

Benjamin’s conception of historical knowledge, which takes the concrete as the content of history, invalidates what is conventionally called “cultural history.” For the continuum of culture is established by the ruling classes just as is that of history in general:

All rulers are heirs of those who conquered before them. Hence, empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers. . . . Whoever has emerged

victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried along in the procession. They are called cultural treasures, and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment. For without exception the cultural treasures he surveys have an origin which he cannot contemplate without horror. . . . And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another.¹⁸

In his monograph on Eduard Fuchs, the nineteenth-century collector and historian, Benjamin addresses himself to the implications of this insight. He argues against several ways in which radicals might attempt to deal with culture. First, the attempt by the Social Democrats to democratize culture by teaching the history of culture to the workers is invalid, for there is no reason to think that knowledge that was useful to the bourgeoisie in oppressing the proletariat would be useful to the proletariat in freeing itself from the bourgeoisie. The interest of emancipation is different from the interest of oppression. Second, one cannot simply say that radicals must take cultural history in hand and rewrite it from their point of view. The notion of cultural history itself, with its implication of a stream of separate but equally significant works, is oppressive:

Cultural history only apparently represents a furthering of insight; it does not conceivably represent a furthering of the dialectic. For cultural history is lacking in the destructive moment which guarantees the authenticity of dialectical thought as well as of the dialectician's experience. Rather, it increases the burden of the treasures heaped up on the collective back of mankind. But it cannot give mankind the strength to shake off these treasures and get them in hand.¹⁹

It is not that these cultural treasures are tainted and must, therefore, be rejected so much as that they are imposed on us from above and oppress us from behind our backs. The implication is that an explosion is needed to destroy the old continuum so that we may pick up the pieces and recover the fact that we ourselves are the authors of history. But "when the continuum of history is exploded by the dialectic, it is nowhere scattered so wide as in the part we call culture."²⁰ The new constellations

that the historical materialist finds consist of things that are disparate from the point of view of conventional cultural history and not necessarily all from within the realm of culture.

The fact that conventional “cultural history” is invalid from the perspective of liberation does not, however, invalidate Marx’s concept of base and superstructure. The Fuchs monograph contains a long footnote on their relation. Benjamin speaks of Fuchs’ “drive for the most immediate kind of mastering of the material,” which results in his lacking “the gift of arousing astonishment.” He continues:

This intuitive, immediate way of looking at things becomes problematic when it tries to provide the material for a materialist analysis. As we know, Marx never wrote at great length about how we are to conceive concretely the relationship of the superstructure to the base. The only thing that is definite is that he envisioned a series of mediations, transmissions, as it were, interposing themselves between the material relations of production and the more distant regions of the superstructure, of which art is one. . . . It is clear that Marx’s classical dialectic of history considers causal relationships of dependence to be given. In later practice people have proceeded much more casually and have often contented themselves with analogies. It is possible that this was related to the claim to replace bourgeois history of literature and culture with equally sweeping materialist ones. That was characteristic of the epoch.²¹

Benjamin illustrates what he means by working with casual analogies by citing Fuchs’ thesis that realism in art can be correlated with mercantile activity in the economic sphere. In contrast, Benjamin tries to establish causal relationships that are specific to the individual historical situation. For example, he sees the technological processes of the creation and dissemination of works of art as integral both to the substance of the work and to the changing nature of art itself. In “The Author as Producer,”²² Benjamin addresses himself directly to the question of the relationship between literature and politics. Rejecting the old dichotomy of “good art” versus “art with the correct political line,” Benjamin considers the point where art and technology meet. He calls that point “literary technique”—“the function that the work has within the literary relationships of production of a period.”²³ An example of (unintentional) change in literary technique is the way newspapers have tended to decrease the difference between

the role of author and that of reader. The radical's intention with respect to literary technique must be what Brecht called "*Umfunktionierung*," functional transformation. Brecht, says Benjamin, "was the first to formulate for intellectuals this far-reaching demand: do not simply transmit the apparatus of production without simultaneously changing it to the maximum extent possible in the direction of socialism."²⁴ Benjamin's analysis of the effects of mechanical reproduction on the nature of art is an example of his attention to "technique."

Benjamin's conception of history continues the tradition of late eighteenth-century German Enlightenment philosophy.²⁵ Liberation is a process of historical enlightenment, both in the sense of sudden illumination—the explosion that dialectical thought creates is a sudden flash of light—and in the sense that liberation is the process of awakening from a dream, moving from the state of being asleep to the state of being awake. Conceiving of liberation as awakening from a dream means that the method of emancipatory historical knowledge is a method of dream interpretation. Fantasy and dreams are historical themselves, much of history occurs on that level, and we must interpret it accordingly. As Benjamin puts it:

The history of the dream remains to be written, and to open up insight into it would be to strike a decisive blow at the superstition of being trapped in nature [*Naturbefangenheit*] through historical enlightenment.²⁶

and:

The evaluation of the elements of a dream on awakening is the classic case of dialectical thought. Thus dialectical thought is the organ of historical awakening.²⁷

The unconscious and its expressions change in history, and we will not be enlightened—that is, gain autonomy, become full subjects—until we incorporate the unconscious into our self-awareness by knowing it historically. That occurs through dialectical thought. Dream interpretation is dialectical in that it accomplishes the *Aufhebung* of the dream into the waking consciousness. It is an example of the kind of historical knowledge Benjamin advocated in the "Theses," for it reorganizes the elements of the dream, gives each its own constellation through

free association, and brings the dream into the context of the present concerns of the dreamer.²⁸

Benjamin is less concerned with the individual than with the social role of fantasy and dream; he is, thus, in the line of those thinkers who sought to integrate Freud into their social and political theories. Benjamin's conception of the social role of fantasy centers on its relation to social change. In the prospectus to the Arcades project he says:

To the form of the new means of production, which in the beginning is still dominated by the old one (Marx), correspond images in the collective unconscious in which the new is mingled with the old. These are wish-images, and in them the collective seeks both to abolish and to transfigure the deficiencies of the social order of production. Further, in these wish-images the emphatic striving to set oneself off against what is out-of-date—that is, what has just passed—appears. These tendencies direct the image-producing fantasy, which received its impetus from what is new, back to the archaic past.²⁹

and:

The development of the productive forces destroyed the wish-symbols of the previous centuries even before the monuments which gave them material form had fallen apart. . . . Not only does every epoch dream of the next one, but in dreaming it also presses toward awakening. It bears its end within itself and unfolds it—as Hegel recognized—with cunning. As the commodity economy becomes precarious we begin to see the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they crumble in fact.³⁰

The collective imagination of a society occupies itself with changes in the forces of production. It works to make clear the changes that are occurring by attaching images of the long-distant past to the new. In its attempt to express the essential nature of the new it projects compensatory images of what the new forces of production might be under different social relations of production, that is, what they might be in liberated form. Thus the manifestations of fantasy will incorporate the ambiguities of social change. By "reading" them we can see both the historical changes that are occurring and their utopian possibilities. And since the form as well as the content of dream and fantasy changes historically,

we must read the changes in the nature of objects, images, and works of art—the expressions or materializations of fantasy—as well. Benjamin's analysis of the modern, to which we now turn, is established largely through such "readings."

II. Commodity Fetishism and the Transformation of Experience in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries³¹

Benjamin turns to the nineteenth century as the beginning of the age of commodity fetishism, a development that continues to transform our experience in the twentieth century. If, as stated in the "Theses," one turns to the past for help, one does so because the fact that these changes took place under capitalism has obscured both the changes themselves and their possibilities, and because for liberation we need the help of the past both to take cognizance of the ways our experience has changed and to become aware of those repressed possibilities.

For Benjamin the essence of the change that took place in the nineteenth century is the destruction of the "aura" around objects, specifically works of art, through mass production of commodities. The same process—and this is a crucial assertion—brings about the destruction of traditional modes of experience through shock and the evolution of new forms of experience that attempt to cope with the shock.

In *The Work of Art* Benjamin defines the "aura" in the following way:

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. . . . The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object.

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term "aura" and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction

is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition.³²

The aura is the unique and, therefore, historical existence of the work of art. With the destruction of the aura, all objects seem in the same way the same, without unique existence, without histories, and without connection to tradition.

Baudelaire is the poet who dealt with the destruction of the aura in the modern age. His poetry is lyric poetry without an aura, poetry transformed by the experience of shock. Benjamin calls Baudelaire's poetry "a star without atmosphere," a star without the aura we usually see around it. The main themes of the Baudelaire essay, however, are not the changes in art as such but the changes in technology and perception that bring about the destruction of the aura and the resulting transformation of experience. These changes may be summed up in the word "shock"; Baudelaire "indicated the price for which the sensation of the modern age may be had: the disintegration of the aura in the experience of shock."³³ Baudelaire derives the shock experience from technologically induced changes in the most basic everyday movements:

The invention of the match around the middle of the nineteenth century brought forth a number of innovations which have one thing in common: one abrupt movement of the hand triggers a process of many steps. This development is taking place in many areas. One case in point is the telephone, where the lifting of a receiver has taken the place of the steady movement that used to be required to crank the older models. Of the countless movements of switching, inserting, pressing, and the like, the "snapping" of the photographer has had the greatest consequences.³⁴

The same qualities—isolation, abruptness, and determination through mechanism—characterize the experience of the worker on the assembly line:

Independently of the worker's volition, the article being worked on comes within his range of action and moves away from him just as arbitrarily. "It is a common characteristic of all capitalist production . . .," wrote Marx, "that working conditions make use of the worker;

but it takes machinery to give this reversal a technically concrete form." In working with machines, workers learn to co-ordinate "their own movements with the uniformly constant movements of an automaton."³⁵

Human beings have had to adapt their experience to these working conditions: "Technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training."³⁶ Benjamin calls the kind of experience produced "shock" because of its violence, its suddenness, and the fact that it occurs in a way that eludes the individual's consciousness of himself as the author of his experience.

Benjamin points to the recurrence of such shocks in areas of life not directly inside the production process—in the experience of the city and in certain social types characteristic of the mid-nineteenth century. The isolated worker amidst the series of uniform, repetitious movements of the assembly line is comparable to the man moving through the big-city crowd (an image of Baudelaire's to which Benjamin refers) or to the man in the flow of traffic:

Moving through this traffic of a big city involves the individual in a series of shocks and collisions. At dangerous intersections, nervous impulses flow through him like the energy from a battery.³⁷

Baudelaire did not write about the assembly line, but he did write about the city-dweller, and about the gambler, who, as Benjamin points out, is like the unskilled factory worker in "the futility, the emptiness, and the inability to complete something."³⁸ Benjamin's description of a lithograph showing gamblers in different attitudes points again to the important element of reactive isolation of the individual whose freedom is delivered over to a mechanism:

The figures presented show us how the mechanism to which the participants in a game of chance entrust themselves seizes them body and soul, so that even in their private sphere, and no matter how agitated they may be, they are capable only of a reflex action.³⁹

Benjamin relates the shock experience to the destruction of the aura by discussing the concept of experience itself, contrasting the new shock-based structure of experience with that possible within a traditional society. He distinguishes between two kinds of "experience": *Erfahrung*, something integrated as experience,

and *Erlebnis*, something merely lived through. It is *Erlebnis* that characterizes the modern age. Following Freud, Benjamin argues that consciousness must defend itself against shock; if an experience is worked over by consciousness it cannot sink in and do damage. This process, however, prevents experiences from entering the subconscious where they would be accessible to involuntary rather than voluntary memory. Thus the conscious defense against shock makes for an impoverishment in real experience (*Erfahrung*):

The greater the share of the shock factor in particular impressions, the more constantly consciousness has to be alert as a screen against stimuli; the more efficiently it does so, the less do these impressions enter experience (*Erfahrung*), tending to remain in the sphere of a certain hour of one's life (*Erlebnis*).

Perhaps the special achievement of shock defense may be seen in its function of assigning to an incident a precise point in time in consciousness at the cost of the integrity of its contents.⁴⁰

Benjamin uses Proust's distinction between voluntary and involuntary memory to distinguish between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*—*Erfahrung* not being possible without the participation of involuntary memory. But what makes involuntary memory and real experience possible is not chance, as Proust imagines, but the integration of the individual into a larger social context through tradition:

Where there is experience in the strict sense of the word, certain contents of the individual past combine with material of the collective past. The rituals with their ceremonies, their festivals (quite probably nowhere recalled in Proust's work) kept producing the amalgamation of these two elements of memory over and over again. They triggered recollection at certain times and remained handles of memory for a lifetime.⁴¹

Modern *Erlebnis*, in contrast, is characterized by the inability to integrate oneself and the world through experience:

Man's inner concerns do not have their issueless private character by nature. They do so only when he is increasingly unable to assimilate the data of the world around him by way of experience. Newspapers constitute one of many evidences of such an inability. If it were the intention of the press to have the reader assimilate the information it

supplies as part of his own experience, it would not achieve its purpose. But its intention is just the opposite, and it is achieved: to isolate what happens from the realm in which it could affect the experience of the reader.⁴²

In general, “the replacement of the older narration by information, of information by sensation, reflect the increasing atrophy of experience.”⁴³

A crucial aspect of shock-experience is that it represents a disturbance of the experience of time and history. The shock-experience is immediate but reactive. This is the crucial point in Benjamin’s critique of vitalist philosophy (directed primarily against Bergson), which in the Baudelaire essay plays an analogous role to the critique of historicism in the “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” Baudelaire, according to Benjamin, directs his poems toward a type of modern reader characterized by distraction and spleen, incapacity for concentration and involvement. To such men vitalist philosophy holds out the image of an authentic, pure experience of time—Bergson’s *durée*. Benjamin criticizes this notion for its ahistoricity. Bergson, says Benjamin, “rejects any historical determination of memory. He thus manages above all to stay clear of that experience from which his own philosophy evolves or, rather, in reaction to which it arose.”⁴⁴ Conceiving of the experience to which Bergson’s philosophy is a reaction in terms not so much of ideology as of transformation of perception, Benjamin describes vitalist philosophy through the image of a perceptual event: the experience in reaction to which it arises is “the inhospitable, blinding age of big-scale industrialism. In shutting out this experience the eye perceives an experience of a complementary nature in the form of its spontaneous after-image, as it were.”⁴⁵ Thus the philosophy itself is a form of shock-defense.

Benjamin’s critique of vitalist philosophy is substantially the same as his critique of historicism in the “Theses”; the ubiquity of shock and the destruction of tradition are the historical causes of both non-messianic conceptions of history. Vitalist philosophy reacts to the modern shock-experience by asserting the spontaneity of the moment, but in denying its own historical situation, it cuts itself off from the possibility of redemption. In putting oneself outside history one suffers like the city-dweller, the assembly-line worker, and the gambler: one must always begin again and can never make use of experience because it consists only of a series of isolated shocks. Isolated from desire, which

depends on the ability to elaborate, through fantasy, wishes that spring from the present but are to be fulfilled through time, one is cut off from the possibility of redemption. For Benjamin the wish is dependent on the ability to have experience, and experience includes historical awareness:

A wish . . . is a kind of experience. The earlier in life one makes a wish, the greater one's chances that it will be fulfilled. The further a wish reaches out in time, the greater the hopes for its fulfillment. But it is experience that accompanies one to the far reaches of time, that fills and divides time. Thus a wish fulfilled is the crowning of experience.⁴⁶

In this sense, desire is closely related to the impelling interest in liberation. Benjamin suggests that a segment of the nineteenth-century collective unconscious suffered an inability to wish due to an inability to renounce the capitalist economic order:

Social bases of impotence: the imagination of the bourgeoisie ceased to occupy itself with the future of the productive forces it had unleashed.

. . . To concern itself further with that future the bourgeoisie would have had to renounce the notion of income. (In the monograph on Fuchs I have showed how the specific "Gemütlichkeit" of the mid-nineteenth century is connected with this well-founded inhibition of social fantasy).⁴⁷

It is not simply technological changes that produce the shock-experience responsible for the destruction of real experience; it is also the requirements of the capitalist socio-economic order. That order requires the continual mass-production of commodities. Man's relation to commodities under capitalism reproduces the structure of the shock-experience: it is characterized by ahistoricity, repetition, sameness, reactivity. Benjamin, following Marx, calls this relation "commodity fetishism," and it was his central intention in the Paris Arcades project to analyze it.

The "need" for a commodity is not at all a wish in the way Benjamin describes it.⁴⁸ Rather, commodities are constructed as stimuli to create reactive needs. They do not arise out of experience so much as introject themselves into it. Paradoxically, they are always new—demand must be renewed and expanded—and yet they are always the same in their formal properties. Fashion is the most striking example of this paradox. Through its ability to convert the organic body into something instrumental, fashion can convert it into a series of stimuli of the commodity type.

The transformation effected by fashion is one part of the transformation of eros into sexuality described by Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization*. As the commodity form invades the erotic realm, sex occurs in the form of stimulus rather than desire, as for the man in the street in Baudelaire's poem "A une Passante." As Benjamin notes,

what makes his body contract in a tremor . . . is not the rapture of a man whose every fiber is suffused with *eros*; it is, rather, like the kind of sexual shock that can beset a lonely man.⁴⁹

The eternal sameness of commodities is due not only to their mass production but also to their very quality as commodities; exchange-value takes precedence over use-value. In a letter to Adorno,⁵⁰ Benjamin points out that identity is an illusion, a hallucination; things, in fact, are similar but never exactly identical. Baudelaire, Benjamin says,

gave artificial aid to the historical hallucination of identity that settled in along with the commodity economy. . . . The phantasmagoria of sameness gives strength to the commodity economy. It is not only an attribute of drug intoxication but also the central image of illusion. . . . The price makes the commodity identical to all those which are sold at the same price.⁵¹

The commodity system depends on illusion, principally the illusion of sameness. This illusion is aided by the fact that mass production robs objects of their unique historical existence. Commodities become phantasms and transform our experience into illusion, into a series of—shocking and repetitive—dream images. Hence the particular relevance of the image of liberation as awakening from a dream.

As dream and object become more immediately equivalent, subjectivity becomes less relevant as an object for investigation; objects invade experience and man becomes objectified:

What forms in the confrontation with the milieu of the second half of the nineteenth century, in dreams and in the words and pictures of certain artists, is a being that should be called the "furnished man."⁵²

For Benjamin, what is important about the surrealists is that they formulated a strategy for regaining contact with precommodity

objects, objects with a history, precisely through contact with dreams:

The surrealists are . . . on the track less of the soul than of things. They are searching for the totem pole of objects in the jungle of archaic history. The very top, final image on this totem pole is kitsch. It is the last mask of the banal, which we don in dream and in conversation in order to take into ourselves the power of the object world which has now died out.⁵³

The abolition of subjectivity means the abolition of historical awareness. In the furnished man the souvenir, a paramount form of the commodity, replaces remembrance:

The souvenir is the complement of *Erlebnis*. It embodies the increasing alienation from himself of the man who takes inventory of his past in the form of dead possessions.⁵⁴

The work of art as traditionally conceived had an aura. It was not a mass-produced commodity, and its appreciation depended on the possibility of authentic experience, *Erfahrung*. What remains of art when the aura, tradition, and *Erfahrung* have been rendered obsolete? Benjamin suggests that art must be seen on a spectrum extending beyond the aesthetic, into religion on the one end and into politics on the other. Art begins in ritual, with cult objects, and is secularized to become art. In the modern period it moves toward the opposite end, politics, and from being a secularized object of worship becomes an object to be exhibited. The historical change from tradition and ritual to politics and exhibition is the change we described in speaking of shock and commodity fetishism: from a social order in which the individual is integrated into the collectivity through mediation of voluntary and involuntary memory, to a social order in which there are large numbers of isolated individuals—masses—who are subject to the unmediated impact of the commodity phantasmagoria. Exhibition is the aggressive assertion of the commodity, and the new situation is political in that it offers the possibility of a restructuring through human rather than divine agency.

The specific subjects of *The Work of Art*, film and photography, fall within the realm of politics and exhibition rather than

that of traditional art. They are media whose formal structure is based on the destruction of the aura and on the principle of shock:

technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training. There came a day when a new and urgent need for stimuli was met by the film. In a film, perception in the form of shocks was established as a formal principle. That which determines the rhythm of production on a conveyor belt is the basis of the rhythm of reception in a film.⁵⁵

By permitting mechanical reproduction of works of art, the photograph, like the lithograph, helped destroy the aura. But in photography as an independent medium there is no longer an original at all. To this aspect of photography the film adds the element of aggressive speed mentioned above.

Film and photography change the relations of persons, images, objects, and reality (for we are concerned both with the actual object encountered and with that of which it is an image); they bring things closer, they destroy the difference between inside and outside, and they render both thing and human subject instrumental, functional.

These changes are akin to those wrought by commodity fetishism. Distances change; no longer a cult object to be worshipped at a distance, the work of art can now be possessed and touched by anyone. Reality cannot keep its distance from art; the camera sees what the eye cannot. This destruction of distance is part of a more general process of abolishing boundaries and differences. What was private becomes public, in the bad sense of "reduced to sameness." Benjamin stresses the "desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction."⁵⁶ By closeness Benjamin does not mean simply that an object is closer to a person; interior distances are changed as well. The camera penetrates inside things; Benjamin compares the photographer to a surgeon. The boundary between what is conscious and what is out of awareness is changed:

Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than to the naked eye—if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for

a space consciously explored by man. Even if one has a general knowledge of the way people walk, one knows nothing of a person's posture during the fractional second of a stride. The act of reaching for a lighter or a spoon is familiar routine, yet we hardly know what has really gone on between hand and metal, not to mention how this fluctuates with our moods. Here the camera intervenes with the resources of its lowerings and liftings, its interruptions and isolations, its extensions and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions. The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses.⁵⁷

There is another sense in which the boundary between inside and outside may be said to be destroyed. The mass existence of the film or photograph puts a greater disjunction between their spatial existence as object and their nature as image than is the case in painting, for instance, or theater. Like commodities in general, the film and the photograph tend to seem more purely images, more like dreams.

But if the film and the photograph are dreams, they are mechanically mediated dreams:

In the theater one is well aware of the place from which the play cannot immediately be detected as illusionary. There is no such place for the movie scene that is being shot. Its illusionary nature is that of the second degree, the result of cutting. That is to say, in the studio the mechanical equipment has penetrated so deeply into reality that its pure aspect freed from the foreign substance of equipment is the result of a special procedure, namely, the shooting by the specially adjusted camera and the mounting of the shot together with similar ones. The equipment-free aspect of reality here has become the height of artifice; the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology.⁵⁸

The spectator of a film, Benjamin observes, identifies not with the actor but with the camera. Both the image and the viewer are interpenetrated with equipment. This is the same process seen in the instrumentalization of the body in fashion and the sexualization of the mechanical product.

This process of instrumentalization in conjunction with the breakdown of boundaries has crucial effects on the reception of the work of art. First, the individual viewer becomes a mass of viewers, through mass reproduction, through the fact that the film is seen by many people at once, through the destruction of

uniqueness that renders the individual obsolete. Second, it means that the reception has a critical, scientific aspect, both by virtue of its equipment-orientation and because new levels of reality are opened for inspection:

As compared with painting, filmed behavior lends itself more readily to analysis because of its incomparably more precise statements of the situation. In comparison with the stage scene, the filmed behavior item lends itself more readily to analysis because it can be isolated more easily. This circumstance derives its chief importance from its tendency to promote the mutual penetration of art and science. . . .⁵⁹

This critical attitude does not mean that mechanical reproduction has suddenly created a mass of critical individuals. Rather, the fact that images become closer and more like dreams, combined with their shock quality, means that they are everywhere received not through concentration, as they traditionally were, but in distraction, as with Baudelaire's reader. "The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one."⁶⁰ Benjamin explains this notion of reception in distraction through the example of architecture; buildings become known by being part of the ambience rather than through intense concentration. The difference from architecture is that the film partakes of the shock quality that forces distraction upon the reader as a protective defense. "The spectator's process of association in view of these [film] images is . . . interrupted by their constant, sudden change. This constitutes the shock effect of the film. . . ."⁶¹

Although Benjamin does not say so directly, his philosophy of history, with its implicit strategy for liberation, is based on possibilities contained in the same modern experience that would seem to make liberation so difficult.⁶² On the most general level, the premises of his strategy for liberation are: we must recover our self-consciousness as authors of our own history precisely where the modern works to destroy it. One way of doing so is to understand the specific nature of the changes that have created modern experience—destruction of the aura, etc. More specifically, however, Benjamin's strategy for creating this true consciousness is to use the violence of the modern shock-experience against itself. This accounts for the violence of his images for dialectical thought—explosions, blasts, quotations swooping down on the reader like highwaymen. "The firm and seemingly brutal

attack belongs to the image of salvation.”⁶³ The possibility of such a reversal depends on the existence of ambiguities and contradictions in the modern. “Salvation holds onto the tiny breaks in the continual catastrophe.”⁶⁴ The principal contradiction Benjamin sees is precisely that which Marx saw, the contradiction between the productive forces and the social relations of production. It is this contradiction that sets social fantasy to work and that creates the need in the ruling classes for ideological transfigurations that will hide the nature of the changes in the productive forces. The critical attitude created by the interpenetration of science and art is another aspect of this contradiction:

The world of things around man takes on more and more shamelessly the character of the commodity. At the same time advertising sets to work to hide and mystify the commodity character of things. This deceptive transfiguration of the commodity world is opposed by turning the commodity world into allegory. The commodity is attempting to look itself in the face.⁶⁵

The modern, precisely in attempting to harness the power of fantasy for commodity production, has made social fantasy more accessible to consciousness and has done so on a large scale. This is the value of the shift in art from ritual to politics. Benjamin’s strategy may be formulated as an attempt to use the power of social fantasy in the cause of liberation by moving from a passive relation of subjection to an alienated phantasmagoria to an active relation of interpretation which reveals discontinuities and contradictions and thus reopens the possibility of redemption.⁶⁶

Notes

1. See, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn, introduction by Hannah Arendt, (New York: Schocken paperback edition, 1969), pp. 253–264. “Eduard Fuchs, der Sammler und der Historiker,” in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, vol. 6 (1937), pp. 346–381, reprinted in *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, edition suhrkamp 28. “Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts,” in *Schriften*, 2 vols., edited by Theodor and Gretel Adorno (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp, 1955), vol. I, pp.

- 406–422, translated in *New Left Review*, no. 48 (March–April 1968), with an introduction by Ben Brewster.
2. See Ben Brewster's introduction to the Arcades project prospectus in *New Left Review*, no. 48 (March–April 1968).
 3. *Illuminations*, p. 254.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 253.
 5. *Schriften*, vol. I, pp. 511–512.
 6. *Ibid.*, pp. 511–512.
 7. *Illuminations*, pp. 253–254.
 8. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
 9. *Ibid.*, p. 255.
 10. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
 11. *Ibid.*, p. 263.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 264.
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
 14. *Ibid.*, p. 262.
 15. *Ibid.*, p. 262.
 16. *Ibid.*, pp. 262–263.
 17. *Ibid.*, p. 263.
 18. *Ibid.*, p. 256.
 19. *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, p. 356.
 20. *Ibid.*, p. 356.
 21. *Ibid.*, p. 363.
 22. "The Author as Producer," translated in *The New Left Review*, no. 62 (July–August, 1970).
 23. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
 24. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
 25. Marcuse and Habermas, too, explicitly refer to the questions posed by Enlightenment philosophy. Kant is a central figure for both of them.
 26. "Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts," *Schriften*, vol. I, p. 423.
 27. *Ibid.*, p. 422.
 28. See "Einbahnstrasse," in *Schriften*, vol. I, pp. 515–517.
 29. "Paris," p. 408.
 30. *Ibid.*, p. 422.
 31. See "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire, *Illuminations*, pp. 155–200; "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, pp. 217–252; "Zentralpark," *Schriften*, vol. I, pp. 473–493; "Traumkitsch," *Schriften*, vol. I, pp. 432–435.
 32. *Illuminations*, pp. 220–221.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 174–175.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 159. This argument is closely related to Benjamin's theory of the decline of the narrative art (in "The Storyteller" translated in *Illuminations*). Benjamin argues that just as the artisan integrated his own touch, his own experience, into his work, so the storyteller passed on his story by integrating it with his own experience and thus making it possible for his listeners to assimilate it. Neither artisanry nor storytelling is possible in the context of the modern disjunction between individual and product.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
47. Zentralpark, *Schriften* I, p. 476.
48. At this point Benjamin's analysis coincides with Marcuse's notion of false needs; see *Essay on Liberation*.
49. "Baudelaire," p. 169.
50. Feb. 3, 1939, *Briefe* II, pp. 805–809.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 806–807.
52. "Traumkitsch," in *Schriften* I, p. 425.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 425.
54. "Zentralpark," p. 487.
55. "Baudelaire," p. 175.
56. "The Work of Art," p. 223.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 236–237.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 233.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 236.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 238.
62. Benjamin's analysis is a self-reflection of experience whose possibility is contained in experience itself. Nevertheless, he does not explicitly include this possibility in his conception of experience (nor does Marcuse). It is

Habermas's contribution to the theory of knowledge, with its construction of self-reflection as emancipatory knowledge, that accounts for this possibility.

63. "Zentralpark," p. 484.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 488.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 480.
66. For an expanded treatment of the strategy of utilizing the contradictions in modern experience for liberation, a strategy one may call making an alliance with the dialectic of one-dimensionality, see Jeremy J. Shapiro, "One-Dimensionality: The Universal Semiotic of Technological Experience," in *Critical Interruptions*, edited by Paul Breines (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

The Dialectic of Theory and Practice in the Age of Technological Rationality: Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas*

Jeremy J. Shapiro

The work of Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas can be seen as a particular branch of Western Marxism that is also a vital break with it.¹ It is unified by the problems it attempts to solve, the questions it asks, the methods it adopts, and its intellectual sources.

The overall problem it confronts is that of identifying and analyzing the structure and trends of twentieth-century society, particularly post-liberal capitalism, from the perspective of Marxian theory while re-examining the nature of Marxian theory in the context of the new historical phase. Marcuse and Habermas have attempted to keep open the possibilities of liberation constructed in Marxian theory by attempting to account for precisely

* This essay is dedicated to Paul and Wini Breines.

those phenomena which seem to run counter to it or escape it: the tremendous development of science and technology has had momentous social, economic, political, and cultural effects. The political and social systems have been integrated. The proletariat has become obsolete, and revolutionary class consciousness has declined. The first communist revolution occurred in a backward nation and led to an anti-democratic political system. Positivist thought has become predominant in advanced capitalism. Students have emerged as a significant radical force. And psychic mechanisms achieve the integration of individuals into society and turn their frustrations into a support of the status quo. In carrying out their project, Marcuse and Habermas have modified Marxism to a point where many no longer regard their work as compatible with it. And, indeed, their elaboration of the dialectical theory of society has led them to criticize certain aspects of Marxism as entangled in the very forms that Marxism is committed to eliminating.

The questions they ask inquire into the nature of critique (the highest form of knowledge, dialectical logic) and its contribution to emancipation; the dialectic of theory and practice; the control and liberation of critical consciousness (the necessary precondition of revolutionary change); labor and its role in the essence of man; the structure of the history of industrial-technological society and its impact on liberation; the critical assimilation of pretechnological culture, and the bases of a nonrepressive society, revolution, and utopia.

The methods adopted are related to Marcuse's and Habermas' intellectual sources. They have returned to German Idealism, particularly to Kant's epistemology and Hegel's early writings, in order to derive a critical, historical, dialectical method and explored Marx's early writings in order to find the philosophical basis of a dialectical theory of society. They have incorporated phenomenology, with its critique of science and emphasis on the primacy of the life-world; hermeneutics, the historical interpretation of meaning, and Max Weber's theory of rationalization, which helps conceptualize the development of one-dimensional society. Most important, they have adopted Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory as the basis of a radical social theory. Although Freud has heavily influenced other Marxian theorists, Marcuse and Habermas have incorporated his work on the deep levels of the philosophy of history and the theory of knowledge.

It is this that most clearly differentiates their work and makes it into a distinct unit. It is worth noting that the critical discussion and appropriation of the tradition of philosophical, social, and political thought is itself one of the principal methods of Marcuse and Habermas: much of their writing is reflective intellectual history.

In recent years, Marcuse and Habermas have been linked with the international movement of student protest. Owing to the student movement's rejection of the motivational structure underlying repressive, one-dimensional society, both Marcuse and Habermas see the student movement as a fundamental factor in the radical transformation of advanced industrial society. Habermas, it is true, has criticized the German movement for "left-wing fascism" and theoretical inadequacies; apparently the movement now considers him a political opponent. I do not possess adequate information on this issue. But I do not see any logical connection between Habermas' theoretical work and an antiradical political position.² Consequently I shall treat his work without regard to any political position or action taken by Habermas personally.

Here I shall deal with only a few subjects: Marcuse's and Habermas' discussions of technological rationality, the individual, the role of critical theory and psychoanalytic theory, and the political intention of these discussions. In concentrating on these general themes, my aim is to provide a framework for reading their individual works.

Herbert Marcuse's work has been political in intent from the beginning. Its aim has been to remove obstacles to revolutionary consciousness, which is the precondition of socialist revolution. The central philosophical idea in Marcuse's work is that

. . . it would be a distortion of the entire significance of Marxian theory to argue from the inexorable necessity that governs the development of capitalism to a similar necessity in the matter of transformation to socialism. . . . The transition [to socialism] is necessary, but only in the sense that the full development of the individual is necessary. . . . There can be no blind necessity in tendencies that terminate in a free and self-conscious society. . . . [Objective conditions] become revolutionary conditions . . . only if seized upon and directed by a conscious activity that has in mind the socialist goal. . . . The process [of transition] might involve a long period of barbarism. The latter can be prevented

only by free action. The revolution requires the maturity of many forces, but the greatest among them is the subjective force, namely, the revolutionary class itself. The realization of freedom and reason requires the free rationality of those who achieve it.³

Marxian theory aims at promoting "free action" by removing the impediments to this free rationality. The development of Marcuse's strategy has been conditioned by one primary factor: the obsolescence of the revolutionary proletariat. In classical Marxian theory, there is an

objective historical coincidence between progress of civilization and the revolutionary action of the industrial proletariat. The latter is, in Marxian theory, the only social force that can accomplish the transition to a higher stage of civilization. Marx derives this coincidence from the intrinsic laws of capitalist development and thus gives it a definite place in the historical process, that is to say, the coincidence itself "passes." According to Marx, there is only one form of its passing: the proletarian revolution abolishes, with the liquidation of all classes, the proletariat as a class and thereby creates a new agent of progress—the community of free men who organize their society in accordance with the possibilities of a human existence for all its members. But the actual development of capitalism suggested still another way of surpassing the historical coincidence, namely, through a fundamental change in the relations between the two conflicting classes whereby the proletariat fails to act as the revolutionary class. . . . [T]he growth of the revolutionary proletariat in the long run *defines* the irreversible direction of capitalist development. Consequently, if the trend is reversed on the side of the proletariat, the capitalist development reaches a new stage to which the traditional Marxian categories no longer apply. A new historical period begins, characterized by a change in the basic class relations. Then, Marxism is faced with the task of redefining the conception of the transition to socialism and of the strategy in this period.⁴

Explicating this change in the structure of history and facing the new tasks it poses are the source of Marcuse's most important achievements.

It should be noted immediately that Marcuse never completely abandoned the classical theory of proletarian revolution. He merely supplemented it with a historical alternative, which has taken on varying forms over time. His work stands under two

conflicting imperatives: to overcome the false consciousness that prevents this revolution and at the same time to disclose new revolutionary potentialities in the historical situation that has successfully suppressed proletarian revolution or immunized itself against it. In either case, this strategy means engaging in an effort at dereification.

As Marx showed, it is in the nature of capitalism to make social relations between men appear as objective relations between things—the fetishism of commodities, or reification. The translation of a socio-historical process into a world of ahistorical facts and objects impedes the proletariat's consciousness of itself as a social and historical agent. Consequently the task of the theorist is to analyze such objects and facts and demonstrate their constitution in the historical process. Once the agent recognizes that it has constituted the facts, it can choose to constitute them otherwise. Thus, revolutionary strategy means bringing men into contact with what Marcuse referred to in his first essay (1928) as the “basic Marxist situation”:

the historical possibility of the radical act, which is to emancipate a necessary, new reality as realization of the whole man. Its agent is the consciously historical man, his field of action is history, which is discovered as the fundamental category of human existence.⁵

The emphasis on history derives from the fact that one of the principal modes of false consciousness generated by capitalism is the elimination of historical consciousness and, therefore, consciousness of the difference between potentiality and actuality as well as of human freedom, which attempts to realize potentialities. Thus, Marcuse wrote in another early essay (1929),

Regaining the ground of authentic decision, without which no existence can permanently subsist, is only to be reached on the way directly into history, not above or beyond it.⁶

In one sense, Marcuse is only paraphrasing Marx. But the emphasis on “history,” “the whole man,” and the adoption of a phenomenological and existentialist framework in his early writings reflects the dilemma posed by the absence and defeat of proletarian revolution.

On the one hand, the Marxian critique of capitalism seems to remain valid. Thus the question arises: what is the basis and legitimization of a revolutionary, dialectical theory of society, if it is not derived from the consciousness of the proletariat? This motivates the attempt to ground a dialectical theory of society independently of the consciousness of the proletariat and locate dialectical contradictions in an ontological or existential substratum that can be discussed independently. Thus Marcuse describes capitalism as a "catastrophe of the human essence" that demands the "catastrophic abolition of the existing conditions through total revolution."⁷ And it is only on the basis of a general theory of total revolution that "the question of the historical conditions and agents of revolution, i.e., the theory of class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat," arises.⁸

On the other hand, Marcuse's attempt to develop an ontological theory of historicity—that is, of history as a fundamental mode of Being—must be understood as a concrete effort to account theoretically for an empirical problem. If the possibility of the realization of freedom and reason rests with a particular form of historical consciousness, then the elimination of the latter becomes one of the most important occurrences in history, and the most vital task of Marxian theory is to explain it. Such an explanation, in turn, requires redefining human existence in order to account for the central role of historical consciousness in it. Thus, reification and the decline of revolutionary class consciousness require a theory of historicity and its suspension, which Marcuse refers to as one-dimensionality. One-dimensionality denotes the elimination of the distinctions between essence and appearance, potentiality and actuality, social and natural, the status quo and what transcends it. Their elimination follows from the loss of the distinction between the present (the realm of reification and ahistoricity) and its historical constitution in the past.

The theory of historicity and one-dimensionality logically has three foci: the political and theoretical problem of how revolutionary consciousness can be brought about; the historical and sociological problem of the origins of one-dimensionality; and the philosophical problem of the nature of man's existence as a historical being subject to one-dimensionality. Abstract as this may sound, it is a framework for the concrete analysis of advanced industrial society from the perspective of socialist rev-

olution that takes seriously the fact that "the proletariat fails to act as the revolutionary class."

The way in which historicity can be regained and revolutionary consciousness brought about is remembrance, which establishes the connection between the present, the ahistorical realm of mere appearance, and the past, in which it is constituted, the realm of essence. Marcuse chooses historical remembrance as the principle and content of Marxian theory and his own work: analyzing the genesis of false consciousness, reification, and ahistoricity in order to regain the "ground of authentic decision," i.e., revolution.

The process just outlined of breaking through reification is thus subject to two conditions: objective relations must become human and therefore social relations, and they must be recognized and consciously maintained as such relations. One of these conditions grounds the other, since objective relations can become human and social if and only if man becomes conscious of them *as such*, in a self- and object-knowledge of man. Here we come once again upon the central role that a particular form of knowledge (man "becoming for himself") plays within the foundation of Marxian theory. To what extent can knowledge, the knowledge of the social character of objectification, become the real lever for the abolition of all reification? . . . This knowledge is no mere theoretical knowledge, no arbitrary passive intuition, but "practice": annulling what exists by making it the "means" to free self-realization.⁹

As a Marxist, Marcuse looks to the labor process for the genesis of one-dimensionality. In an early essay (1933), human existence is described as characterized by two dimensions of labor: free self-activity, or "authentic practice, toward which all other labor is oriented as its 'end,'"¹⁰ and labor in the realm of necessity, which has its end outside itself and is delivered over to objectivity. In class society the two dimensions are allotted to different classes, until eventually (under capitalism) "the mechanical practice of the 'economic dimension' absorbs the *entirety* of existence and objectifies even the *free* practice of existence."¹¹ It is only through labor that man becomes real as a historical being. Man labors "on and in the present through the transformative preservation and abolition of the past in anticipatory concern for the future."¹² Thus he acquires a specific place in historical happening. One-dimensionality, or the complete reduction of labor to the realm

of necessity and objectivity (technical rationalization) has “deprived labor of its authentic meaning: it is no longer essentially connected with real happening, with the real practice of existence.”¹³ Thus the capitalist labor process transforms the nature of human existence itself and makes it difficult for those engaged in it to undertake the authentic practice that would be necessary for their liberation.

Marcuse’s 1941 article, “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology,” gives this speculative theory a concrete, sociological embodiment and lays the foundation for his later work. Here the social unity of post-liberal capitalism is described as the “technological apparatus” under whose impact

individualistic rationality has been transformed into technological rationality. It is by no means confined to the subjects and objects of large-scale enterprises but characterizes the pervasive mode of thought and even the manifold forms of protest and rebellion. This rationality establishes standards of judgment and fosters attitudes which make men ready to accept and even to intercept the dictates of the apparatus.¹⁴

The apparatus, as a pre-given continuum of means and ends, “absorbs the liberating efforts of thought.” The “former freedom of the economic subject” has been “submerged in the efficiency with which he (performs) services assigned to him.” Human instincts, desires, and thoughts are turned into “channels that feed the apparatus;” “the mechanical contrivances which facilitate intercourse among individuals also intercept and absorb their libido, thereby diverting it from the all too dangerous realm in which the individual is free of society.”¹⁵ Marcuse describes the ways in which

technological rationalization has created a common framework of experience for the various professions and occupations. This experience excludes or restrains those elements that transcend technical control over matters of fact and thus extends the scope of rationalization from the objective to the subjective world.¹⁶

This extension is brought about primarily by the extension of bureaucracy, technology, and the victory of large-scale economic organizations over small-scale entrepreneurs, as well as by the machine process itself. The mechanics of conformity “spread from

the technological to the social order; they govern performance not only in the factories and shops, but also in the offices, schools, assemblies, and, finally, in the realm of relaxation and entertainment.”¹⁷ Owing to the efficiency and standardization that it brings about, social control by the ruling class and bureaucracy becomes identified with rationality itself.

The technological apparatus grows out of individualistic (liberal capitalist) society. It creates a split between two types of rationality: technological and critical.

The originally identical and “homogeneous” truth seems to be split into two different sets of truth values and two different patterns of behavior: the one assimilated to the apparatus, the other antagonistic to it; the one making up the prevailing technological rationality and governing the behavior required by it, the other pertaining to a critical rationality whose values can be fulfilled only if it has itself shaped all personal and social relationships. The critical rationality derives from the principles of autonomy which individualistic society itself had declared to be its self-evident truths. Measuring these principles against the form in which individualistic society had actualized them, critical rationality accuses social injustice in the name of individualistic society’s own ideology.¹⁸

In Marcuse’s work, critical rationality is identified with individualistic rationality, which, “in a society which was not yet rational, constituted a principle of permanent unrest and opposition.”¹⁹ This holds true even for Marxian theory. Contrasting the emergence of the modern masses with the proletariat in Marxian theory, Marcuse writes that

the Marxian proletariat is not a crowd but a class, defined by its determinate position in the productive process, the maturity of its “consciousness,” and the rationality of its common interest. Critical rationality, in the most accentuated form, is the prerequisite for its liberating function. In one aspect, at least, this conception is in line with the philosophy of individualism: it envisions the rational form of human association as brought about and sustained by the autonomous association and action of free men.²⁰

Since critical rationality is sustained by individualism, which is destroyed by the technological apparatus, the latter can absorb the force of critique. As the propositions of critical rationality

become part and parcel of the established culture, however, they seem to lose their edge and to merge with the old and the familiar. This familiarity with the truth illuminates the extent to which society has become indifferent and insusceptible to the impact of critical thought. For the categories of critical thought preserve their truth value only if they direct the full realization of the social potentialities which they envision. . . .²¹

The apparatus absorbs the critical impetus not merely of the individual but also of the labor movement: "The critical rationality of its aims was subordinated to the technological rationality of its organization and thereby 'purged' of the elements which transcended the established pattern of thought and action."²² This is the cunning of reason. Since individualism itself, through competition, led to the creation of an all-embracing apparatus, "this apparatus is the embodiment and resting place of individualistic rationality, but the latter now requires that individuality must go."²³ Consequently, critique, freedom, and the transcendence of established goals have been rendered impotent and obsolete.

There is one further element in Marcuse's analysis, countering the "pessimistic" implications of the above. This is analytically the vaguest notion in his theory; yet it is the basis of the most radical tendencies in his thought and the reason why he was later to become the adopted sponsor of the international New Left and the most significant theorist of advanced industrial society to come from his generation of Marxists. It is what most separates him from his associates Horkheimer and Adorno and what propels him beyond the most unorthodox versions of Marxism. For Marcuse points to a new, progressive dialectic *within* technological rationality. He considers the possibility that individuality in the traditional sense may not be the precondition of freedom, and that some new basis of opposition, transcending the already absorbed Marxian labor movement, is rising as a *consequence* of technological rationality. The process of standardization

may bring to the fore the tendencies which make individuality a historical form of human existence, to be surpassed by further social development. This does not mean that society is bound to enter a stage of "collectivism." The collectivistic traits which characterize the development today may still belong to the phase of individualism.²⁴

By clearing the ground for the conquest of scarcity, technology

not only levels individuality but also tends to transcend it where it is concurrent with scarcity. . . . The cultural standardization points, paradoxically enough, to potential abundance as well as actual poverty. . . . The striking impoverishment which characterizes the dissolution of . . . [traditional] forms [of art, literature, and philosophy] may involve a new source of enrichment. They derived their truth from the fact that they represented the potentialities of man and nature which were excluded or distorted in the reality.²⁵

Such an enrichment would constitute a qualitatively new form of human existence, one which is individualistic, yet has nothing to do with the individualism that the technological process has eliminated and that, even when critical, was based upon the struggle for existence and competition. For

the less individuality is required to assert itself in standardized social performances, the more it could retreat to a free "natural" ground. These tendencies, far from engendering collectivism, may lead to new forms of individualization. The machine individualizes men by following the physiological lines of individuality: it allocates the work to finger, hand, arm, foot, classifying and occupying men according to the dexterity of these organs. The external mechanisms which govern standardization here meet a "natural" individuality; they lay bare the ground on which a hitherto suppressed individualization might develop. . . . The technological process has reduced the variety of individual qualities down to this natural basis of individualization, but this same basis may become the foundation for a new form of human development.²⁶

Here Marcuse points to a new realm of liberation. "No longer chained to competitive efficiency, the self could grow in the realm of satisfaction. Man could come into his own in his passions."²⁷ Technology has its own dialectic, which eliminates on a higher level the contradictions it has inherited from the individualist past: a dialectic of technology, scarcity, and human nature. Thus the analysis of the development of one-dimensionality as technological rationality leads to the third focus of Marcuse's theory: man's nature as a historical being.

As Marcuse concretized his speculative theory of one-dimensionality in the realm of labor as a theory of technological rationality, so he concretized his theory of the historicity of existence

in the framework of Freud's psychoanalytic theory. This theoretical shift is a response to the original political problem confronted by Marcuse. First and foremost, psychoanalytic theory is a theory of the historicity of the individual *and* of the repression of his consciousness of his own historicity. Second, it shows how this very repression leads to the individual's identification with authority and to the suppression of his innermost needs. It is thus particularly suitable for understanding how and why individuals abstain from or fight against the free rationality and revolutionary action that could liberate them. Third, it confirms the emancipatory power of remembrance and of fantasy. Thus, it opens up the present both toward the past and the future.

In Marcuse's first major work, devoted to the theory of historicity, he grounded historicity in "life."²⁸ In his essay "On Hedonism," he elaborated a materialist theory of objective happiness that justified the gratification of instincts and needs as a basic category of Marxian theory.²⁹ These notions were integrated with the dialectic of technology, scarcity, and human nature in *Eros and Civilization*. The "natural basis of individualization" (see above) is the pleasure principle that governs the human organism before it is subjected to societal repression (in the Freudian sense). Technological rationality manifests itself as the "performance principle," the historical form of the reality principle operating in a stratified society in which work is formed to fit the requirements of an apparatus controlled by a ruling group in its own interest. The concept of the liberation of historical consciousness is expressed as the psychoanalytic remembrance of things past and repressed. The elimination of individuality is analyzed in terms of changes in the structure and relation of id, ego, and superego under the impact of changes in family structure and large-scale social organization combined with the manipulation of consciousness. The technological dialectic that changes human nature is described as one in which "the living links between the individual and his culture are loosened," since technology conquers scarcity and the energy necessary for repression is diminished.³⁰ Marcuse speaks of a "revolt of the instincts." Man's "coming into his own in his passions" is concretized by Marcuse in a long analysis of the instinctual and metapsychological bases of a nonrepressive civilization ruled by aesthetic rationality in which sexuality is liberated while sublimating itself into Eros.

After expanding his analysis of technological rationality in

One-Dimensional Man, particularly in demonstrating the effect of automation in reducing the proletariat's role in the process of production and the ability of one-dimensional society to make possible the "simultaneous release of repressed sexuality and aggressiveness" through "repressive desublimation," Marcuse explores some of the political ramifications of his theory in *Essay on Liberation*. There he establishes a relation between current political movements, the student movement, and the "counter-culture," on the one hand, and the forces of liberation from technological rationality on the other. The "free 'natural' ground of individuality" and the revolt of the instincts are interpreted as a "biological foundation for socialism," whose concrete manifestation is the aesthetic-erotic ethos of the young. By putting forth qualitatively new needs, this ethos cannot be absorbed by the technological apparatus and thus contributes to the development of the free rationality that is the precondition for socialism.

This entire analysis was developed by Marcuse within the framework of Marxian theory. He sees the development of technological rationality arising out of the dynamic of capitalist development and bourgeois individualism even while supplanting it. *Reason and Revolution* is devoted to reconstructing the foundations of dialectical thought and Marxian theory, and *One-Dimensional Man* continues the critique of positivism and defense of the dialectic presented in the earlier book. All the problems analyzed by Marcuse in his works attempt to extend Marxian theory to account for phenomena that would seem to contradict it. But he does not answer the question raised above about the basis and legitimization of a revolutionary, dialectical theory of society if it is not derived from and addressed to the consciousness of the proletariat. His own analyses make this question increasingly urgent. As Marcuse writes in *One-Dimensional Man*,

Confronted with the total character of the achievements of advanced industrial society, critical theory is left without the rationale for transcending this society. The vacuum empties the theoretical structure itself, because the categories of a critical social theory were developed during the period in which the need for refusal and subversion was embodied in the action of effective social forces.³¹

The problem arises in this form because Marcuse, although he has adapted Marxian theory to a new historical phase, still regards

his conceptions as meaningful only within a Marxian framework that is itself dependent on the prior historical phase. But, if critical theory still makes sense in one-dimensional society, then it must draw its legitimacy from another source. This question is one of the central concerns of Jürgen Habermas.

Jürgen Habermas has completed the theoretical transition to the new historical phase described by Marcuse. He has developed not only a theory of technological rationality but a general social theory and a theory of knowledge as well. All of these have the virtue of integrating the major achievements of recent "bourgeois sociology" and "bourgeois philosophy" while modifying them in accordance with a radical perspective derived from the Marxian tradition.

Before explicating his work, let us state how it can be conceived as providing an answer to the questions posed by Marcuse. First, if critical consciousness is a prerequisite of revolution, then we must take seriously the nature of the consciousness that precedes it if we are to understand the transition from one to another. Hence we must recognize the constitutive importance of *legitimation* (mythical and ideological) in the social order. If the achievements of technological rationality are based on repression, which must be undone as a prerequisite to liberation, then we must look to the psychoanalytic method that deals with the elimination of repression. We find that this never takes place through the revolt of the instincts, but rather through a particular form of communication between the patient and the analyst: *unconstrained but reflective communication*. If one-dimensionality as a form of domination consists in the absorption of "free practice" by labor that has its end outside itself, then we must investigate these two dimensions both historically and in contemporary society in order to make possible the liberation of the former from the latter, of the *practical from the technical*. The practical is the realm of symbolic interaction, which consists of structures of social norms based on an intersubjectively shared ordinary language and comprising reciprocal expectations about behavior. The institutional framework of society is rooted in symbolic interaction. The technical is the realm of purposive-rational (instrumental and strategic) action, consisting of systems of technical rules based on a context-free language, i.e., one that can be used independently of the social situation. It aims at the control of objectified, natural processes through scientific knowledge, at

problem-solving and the adaptation of means to ends. These two realms are the basic categories of Habermas' social theory.³²

These considerations point up three areas in which Habermas differs from Marcuse: his conceptions (1) of the individual, (2) of scientific knowledge and technology, and (3) of the nature and role of knowledge and consciousness.

The thought of Marcuse (and of the Frankfurt School in general) is largely an elaboration of the dialectic of the individual, based on a historically ambivalent commitment to bourgeois individualism. On the one hand, the elimination of the autonomous individual is the great tragedy of one-dimensional society. On the other, the autonomous individual, when looked at more closely, turns out to be merely an expression of private property. How can a model of advanced capitalism be based on the elimination of something that never existed?

Habermas takes the social constitution of individuality at a deeper level than Marcuse. Combining early Hegel and social interaction theory, Habermas argues that the individual exists only as part of a social structure of intersubjectivity based on mutual recognition that the self and the other are simultaneously identical and non-identical.³³ This structure is built into the nature of language and interaction. The crucial changes in the individual in one-dimensional society must be conceived as a change in the social relation of which individuality is a part: a disturbance of intersubjectivity, or a systematic distortion of communication. One-dimensional society

violates an interest grounded in one of the two fundamental conditions of our cultural existence: in language, or more precisely, in the form of socialization and individuation determined by communication in ordinary language. This interest extends to the maintenance of intersubjectivity of mutual understanding as well as to the creation of communication without domination.³⁴

This is because technological rationality, that is, the expansion of the realm of what can be controlled and manipulated as an object according to technical rules, completely bypasses the level of understanding, action, reflection, and decision that is essential to the practical dimension:

The moral realization of a normative order is a function of communicative action oriented to shared cultural meaning and presupposing the

internalization of values. It is increasingly supplanted by conditioned behavior, while large organizations as such are increasingly patterned after the structure of purposive-rational action. The industrially most advanced societies seem to approximate the model of behavioral control steered by external stimuli rather than guided by norms. Indirect control through fabricated stimuli has increased. . . . The increase in *adaptive behavior* is, however, only the obverse of the dissolution of the sphere of linguistically mediated interaction by the structure of purposive-rational action. This is paralleled subjectively by the disappearance of the difference between purposive-rational action and interaction from the consciousness not only of the sciences of man, but of men themselves.³⁵

The elimination of the “individual” is really the elimination of the structure of communication and interaction in which individualization is rooted. Accordingly, by abandoning the monadic, bourgeois theory of the individual, Habermas escapes the above dilemma. What one-dimensional society suppresses is not the nonexistent autonomous individual of a previous historical period, but rather the potential social individual existing within every human being.

A consequence of this theoretical modification concerns the agents of liberation. For Marcuse, the obsolescence of the proletariat and the autonomous individual destroyed possible agents of revolution. True, the revolt of the instincts struggles with technological rationality, but it can be misled via repressive desublimation. Consequently, critical theory has no one to whom it may address itself. For Habermas, the vitiation of interaction by the misapplication of technological rationality locates the interest in emancipation in the very constitution of man. But the latter is not merely “biological”; the human animal is constituted by language, knowledge, and consciousness. The interests violated by one-dimensional society are not located “beneath” the technological apparatus in a biological dimension. They are present within the apparatus itself, in all social relations based on communication distorted by the interest of domination.

The second area, science, affects both the conception of technological rationality and the status of critical theory itself. The Marxian tradition, as Habermas has demonstrated in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, has confused the theoretical status of science and critique.³⁶ Either it equates them and regards critical theory as a positive science, or it distinguishes them by considering criti-

cal theory itself to be true knowledge and science to be merely an ideological instrument of the ruling class. In the first case, Marxism would have to subject itself to the standards of modern science, which exclude the dialectic as a mythical remnant. In the second, Marxism would have to become a metaphysics, having an independent source of knowledge superior to that of the sciences. As long as Marxism legitimated itself as the expression of proletarian class consciousness, it was in fact such a metaphysics. And, if Marxism regards science as a mere instrument of the bourgeoisie, then it must be able to say, for example, what a nonbourgeois physics would be like, or a specifically socialistic technology. However, no Marxist has been able to do this; nor is the problem solved by Marcuse's suggestion of aesthetic rationality as a higher form of reason.

Habermas' solution involves rethinking the nature of science and of knowledge in general. The confusion between science and critical theory arises from the failure to distinguish between the meanings, the objects, and the methods of inquiry used by the different modes of knowledge, because the theory of knowledge and philosophy of science have failed to take account of the interests guiding the modes of knowledge. Theory is not mere passive contemplation of objectivity given facts. It is also practice, acting in the world and constructing or reconstructing the world. Habermas distinguishes three types of knowledge: the natural sciences, the cultural sciences, and the critical sciences. Each has its own way of constituting reality, while each is in turn constituted by an interest of the human species in its evolution.

If we examine the statements of the natural sciences, we see that they

can be interpreted as statements about the covariance of observable magnitudes; given a set of initial conditions, they make predictions possible. Empirical-analytical knowledge is thus possible predictive knowledge. . . . In controlled observation, which often takes the form of experiment, we generate initial conditions and measure the results of operations carried out under these conditions. . . . [T]heories of the empirical sciences disclose reality subject to the constitutive interest in the possible securing and expansion, through information, of feedback-monitored action.³⁷

The natural sciences do not describe reality as such; rather, they contribute to and generalize our ability to control the environ-

ment—they are governed by a “technical cognitive interest.” The latter reflects man’s organic constitution as a being that adapts the environment to itself through purposive-rational action. This has its counterpart in technology, whose development

lends itself to being interpreted as though the human species had taken the elementary components of the behavioral system of purposive-rational action, which is primarily rooted in the human organism, and projected them one after another onto the plane of technical instruments, thereby unburdening itself of the corresponding functions.³⁸

Technological rationality is not imposed upon a pleasure-seeking human organism by a hostile reality; it is part of man’s constitution, as is science. The principles of science *are* universally valid—but only within the domain of possible objects of technical control.

The cultural sciences are based on the understanding of meaning via the interpretation of texts. This understanding is always mediated by categories derived from the interpreter’s initial situation.

The world of traditional meaning discloses itself to the interpreter only to the extent that his own world becomes clarified at the same time. The subject of understanding establishes communication between both worlds. He comprehends the substantive content of tradition by *applying* tradition to himself and his situation. . . . [H]ermeneutic inquiry discloses reality subject to a constitutive interest in the preservation and expansion of the intersubjectivity of possible action-orienting mutual understanding. The understanding of meaning is directed in its very structure toward the attainment of possible consensus among actors in the framework of a self-understanding derived from tradition. This we shall call the practical cognitive interest, in contrast to the technical.³⁹

Owing to the basic role of language and culture in human society and their prerequisite of mutual understanding, the latter’s extension is as central to social evolution as the extension of technical control.

Critique and critical theory differ essentially from either of these two modes of knowledge. Critique attempts

to determine when theoretical statements grasp invariant regularities of social action as such and when they express ideologically frozen

relations of dependence that can in principle be transformed. To the extent that this is the case, the critique of ideology as well, moreover, as psychoanalysis, take into account that information about lawlike connections sets off a process of reflection in the consciousness of those whom the laws are about. Thus the level of unreflected consciousness, which is one of the initial conditions of such laws, can be transformed. . . . The meaning of the validity of critical statements of this category is established by the concept of *self-reflection*. The latter releases the subject from dependence on hypostatized powers. Self-reflection is determined by an emancipatory cognitive interest.⁴⁰

There is a built-in human capacity to attain autonomy and responsibility via self-reflection, which, indeed is presupposed by Marcuse's (and Marx's) theory of revolutionary consciousness. Self-reflection is not an individual process, but a social one, just as the state of unfreedom and dependence to which it is applied is social. Habermas takes psychoanalysis as paradigmatic. The origin of neurosis

is typically a situation in which the child . . . suffered and repulsed an unbearable conflict. This repulsion is coupled with a process of desymbolization [i.e., the elimination of symbols from consciousness] and the formation of a symptom. The child excludes the experience of the conflict-filled object relationship from public communication (and at the same time makes it inaccessible for his own ego as well); it separates the conflict-loaded portion of the object representation and desymbolizes, so to speak, the meaning of the relevant reference person.⁴¹

In psychoanalysis, the analyst establishes a connection between the original scene in which this occurred, the patient's relation to the analyst, and the patient's situation in everyday life. In so doing, he makes it possible for the neurotic symptom, which is the individual's private substitute for the repressed symbol, to become meaningful within the public language shared by patient and analyst.⁴² This translation from the patient's private language into public communication involves self-reflection:

Freud always emphasizes that a patient who enters analytic treatment may not relate to his illness as to a somatic disease. He must be brought to regard the phenomena of his illness as part of his self. Instead of treating his symptoms and their causes as external, the patient must

be prepared, so to speak, to assume responsibility for his illness. . . . Because analysis expects the patient to undergo the experience of self-reflection, it demands "moral responsibility for the content" of the illness. For the insight to which analysis is to lead is indeed only this: that the ego of the patient recognize itself in its other, represented by its illness, as in *its own alienated self* and identify with it. . . . Analytic knowledge is also moral insight, because in the movement of self-reflection the unity of theoretical and practical reason has not yet been abolished.⁴³

If an individual's self is split-off from him and manifests itself as a compulsive force because he cannot recognize himself in it, then his interest in emancipation from this power is identical with his interest in self-knowledge. Thus, in emancipatory knowledge, interest and knowledge are identical. For knowledge itself changes its object, which in this case is the subject.

Habermas uses psychoanalysis as a model for critical knowledge in general, including the specific sort of knowledge that Marxism has tried or claimed to be. Marxism, as knowledge that aims at freeing men from oppressive social relations that they do not recognize to be of their own making, differs fundamentally from knowledge of the laws of motion of an economic system, although it may refer to such laws insofar as they represent reified social relations. It is, as Marcuse wrote (see above), "self- and object-knowledge of man" that "annuls what exists by making it the 'means' to free self-realization." Although critical theory may at a given time overlap with the consciousness of a specific social group, it is rooted more generally in man's emancipatory cognitive interest. The latter, in turn, is based on the capacity for self-reflection given with human culture, language, and selfhood, and the conflict between distorted and undistorted communication that arises from socialization patterns.

No matter how the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding may be deformed, the design of an ideal speech situation is necessarily implied with the structure of potential speech; for every speech, even that of intentional deception, is oriented towards the idea of truth. This idea can only be analyzed with regard to a consensus achieved in unrestrained and universal discourse.⁴⁴

All known social structures and socialization patterns restrict the ideal speech situation (pure intersubjectivity). The task of critical

theory is to define and analyze them in their historical concreteness.

These analyses facilitate the analysis of one-dimensional society, whose defining characteristic is, according to Habermas, that technological rationality becomes both the legitimating ideology of the society *and* the model for the comprehension of human affairs. This model cannot account for or allow self-reflection or enlightened action on the basis of a critical appropriation of tradition, which transcends the framework of purposive-rational action. This theory parallels Marcuse's notion of historicity and its suppression by one-dimensionality.

To account for the phenomenon of rationalization, Habermas constructs a theory of social evolution.⁴⁵ In the early phases of prehistory, purposive-rational action could be motivated only through ritual attachment to interactions. In the course of evolution, subsystems of purposive-rational action (such as economic organizations) were separated out from the institutional framework. In the first civilizations, these subsystems were developed enough to provide technically exploitable knowledge that was independent of the myths and religions used to legitimate power in these societies. But until the evolution of modern capitalism, such subsystems and their technically exploitable knowledge were never expanded to the point where they became a direct threat to the authority of the cultural traditions legitimating political power; the institutional framework was superior to the forces of production. Capitalism, however, "can be comprehended as a mechanism that guarantees the *permanent* expansion of subsystems of purposive-rational action and thereby overturns the traditionalist superiority of the institutional framework to the forces of production."⁴⁶

Its specific innovation is to have called into question the traditional form of legitimating power. Instead of being justified by myths, political power is now legitimated by the supposed justice of the market:

Traditional authority was political authority. Only with the emergence of the capitalist mode of production can the legitimization of the institutional framework be linked immediately with the system of social labor. Only then can the property order change from a *political relation* to a *production relation*, because it legitimates itself through the rationality of the market, the ideology of exchange society, and no longer through a legitimate power structure.⁴⁷

As capitalism expands, all traditional structures adapt to purposive rationality. At the same time, traditional worldviews lose their power as myth and religion and become subjective belief systems. The first real ideologies come into being when rationalistic, scientific systems emerge to criticize traditions and at the same time legitimate existing power relations. Since the end of the nineteenth century, there has been an increase in state intervention in the economy and expansion of the sciences to the point where they have become the leading productive force.⁴⁸ This had two consequences for Marxism. Marxism had arisen and derived its critical force as a critique of bourgeois ideology, and particularly of bourgeois political economy. The politicization of the economy meant, Habermas argues, that a critical theory of society could no longer be merely a critique of political economy, since the justice of the market was no longer the basic legitimization of authority. Second, the rise of science and technology as a leading productive force rendered inoperative the labor theory of value, for the value added by applied science can no longer be computed as a multiple of simple labor power.⁴⁹

The decline of the market principle favored the adoption of technology and science as ideology. Politics takes on a negative character, "for it is oriented toward the elimination of dysfunctions and the avoidance of risks that threaten the system: not, in other words, toward the realization of practical goals but toward the solution of technical problems."⁵⁰ This also requires a depoliticization of the mass of the population, for "it eliminates practical questions and therewith precludes discussion about the adoption of standards; the latter could emerge only from a democratic decision-making process."⁵¹ The increased application of technical models to the solution of political and social problems ultimately leads to the consequences mentioned above: "the culturally defined self-understanding of a social life-world is replaced by the self-reification of men under categories of purposive-rational action and adaptive behavior."⁵² The state can suspend class antagonism. Mass loyalty is created with the aid of rewards for privatized needs. Positivism replaces the frame of reference of symbolic interaction, the distinction between the practical and the technical is eliminated.

Technological rationalization is not per se politically and socially liberating. The true rationalization of political and social relations means removing restrictions from communica-

tion, enabling public, unrestricted discussion and democratic decision making to take place. For the problem is not one of better technical solutions, better utilization of economic resources, etc., but rather of creating institutions and social norms that expand the realm of freedom and choice. Opening up communication would change prevailing norms and decrease social repressiveness. It would be the first step toward generalized democracy. Such communication, by confronting the ideology of technological rationality with the human needs sacrificed to it, would involve criticizing the achievement ideology of one-dimensional society. Habermas sees students as an important factor in realizing this critique, because of their experience of the dissolution of parental authority and the spread of permissive educational techniques. "In the long run, therefore, student protest could permanently destroy this crumbling achievement ideology, and thus bring down the already fragile legitimating basis of advanced capitalism, which rests only on depoliticization."⁵³ Furthermore, although Habermas does not expect students alone to be able to accomplish major social change, he attributes great importance to radicalization of the educational system. For it is there that the problem of the subordination of the technological apparatus to critically reflected human needs is most directly expressed. Radical education based on a radical theory of knowledge is itself a vital political problem.

Ideological though they may be in usage, the fashionable terms "Technological Society," "Global Village," "Paleocybernetic Age," and so on designate a qualitatively new historical phase. The work of Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas is an attempt to understand this phase in its bearing on human freedom. This relation can be looked at from two points of view: what are the potentialities for human freedom in this period, and how does the problem of freedom constitute our conception of this period in the first place? A critical theory of history and society must ask both questions. Marcuse's concept of one-dimensional society and Habermas' idea of the replacement of practice by technique define the current phase with regard to the way in which they eliminate freedom. Marcuse's notion of a biological foundation for socialism and the new sensibility (aesthetic-erotic morality) and Habermas' conception of removing restrictions from communication are indications of concrete paths that efforts at liberation might take.

In developing these ideas, Marcuse and Habermas have taken the Marxian theory elaborated in an earlier historical phase and reformulated and revised it to preserve its radical content while making it relevant to the new historical phase. This process of revision has been the source of what may be their most significant achievement: the elaboration of a radical, critical *method* for dealing with the problem of human freedom in society, one that can incorporate scientific knowledge of man and society. Here they have taken the Marxian dialectic and developed it by returning to its origins in Kantian and Hegelian philosophy on the one hand and extending it to take account of modern philosophy and social theory on the other.

Marcuse argues that the dialectical mode of thought, or the power of negative thinking, "is alien to the whole established universe of discourse and action. It seems to belong to the past and to be rebutted by the achievements of technological civilization. The established reality seems promising and productive enough to repel or absorb all alternatives."⁵⁴ At the same time, he attempts to root the dialectic deeply and concretely in the structure of human instincts as they are affected by technology, and supports the dialectical method through his own analyses of industrial society and intellectual history.

Habermas argues that the dialectical mode of thought, or self-reflection, is grounded in the basic structure of human interaction and language, and encompasses individual processes of individual self-reflection in psychoanalysis, political self-reflection, in which a political group's self-understanding is modified through the mediation of its tradition with new technical possibilities and the comprehension of its relations with other groups; and philosophical self-reflection, in which the relation of scientific knowledge to human interests is established. Thus Habermas sketches out the idea of a critical method for a technological civilization, which would counteract the subordination of critical thought to the scientific positivism that justifies the status quo.

Marcuse has written of the catastrophe of liberation: we have so much investment, psychic as well as economic, in the established order, that the possibility of a qualitatively different form of life terrifies us. As in psychoanalysis, commitment to self-reflection is the only hope in dealing with this terror. The central concept of the Marxian dialectic is the unity of theory and practice. Knowledge is to serve the interest of political emancipa-

tion; but it is not pragmatic, for it does not serve a pre-given political end. Rather, it participates in defining ends. The current historical situation has called into question the ideas of the radical tradition even while discrediting the technocratic conceptions of one-dimensional thought. Hence, as Marcuse and Habermas stress, the need for enlightenment, critical consciousness, and self-reflection is a primary political need. Only after this path has been chosen does it become possible to develop concrete political goals. For the social needs that make up the raw material of radical social theory are reinterpreted as they are comprehended by theory; their content changes. Thus the commitment to self-reflection means, at the present time, a commitment to rigorous, radical education and to open communication and public discussion, which involve new forms of human relations at every level. In turn, this commitment can be considered political only if it includes the commitment to resist and struggle against every form of authority that is not based on such communication and discussion.

Notes

1. This is part of a larger work in progress on the intellectual and social origins of current critical theory. For the sociology of the new historical phase to which Marcuse and Habermas are a response, see my "One-Dimensionality: the Universal Semiotic of Technological Experience," in Paul Breines, ed., *Critical Interruptions: New Left Perspectives on Herbert Marcuse* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970). For the philosophical background of Marcuse and Habermas, particularly in Kant, see my "From Marcuse to Habermas," in *Continuum*, 8, no. 1 (1970) as well as the essays by Paul Lorenzen and Albrecht Wellmer in the same issue. I should like to thank Donna Huse and Shierry M. Weber, my colleagues at the Center for the Study of Technological Experience, for their ongoing collaboration, and Charlotte Riley for her editorial help and encouragement.
2. Habermas' own expressed positions on the student movement are published in his *Protestbewegung und Hochschulreform* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp, 1969), some of which is translated in Habermas' *Toward a Rational Society*, translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon, 1970). Left-wing criticisms of Habermas can be found in *Die Linke antwortet Jürgen Habermas* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1968).

3. Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* (Boston: Beacon, 1960), p. 317ff.
4. Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism* (New York: Vintage, 1961), p. 3ff.
5. Herbert Marcuse quoted by Alfred Schmidt in his "Existential-Ontologie und historischer Materialismus bei Herbert Marcuse" in Jürgen Habermas, ed., *Antworten auf Herbert Marcuse* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp, 1968), p. 24.
6. Herbert Marcuse, "Zur Wahrheitsproblematik der soziologischen Methode," in *Die Gesellschaft* 6 (1929): 369.
7. Herbert Marcuse, "Neue Quellen zur Grundlegung des Historischen Materialismus" (1932), reprinted in *Ideen zu einer kritischen Theorie der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp, 1969), p. 34.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 39f.
10. "Über die philosophischen Grundlagen des wirtschaftswissenschaftlichen Arbeitsbegriffs," reprinted in *Kultur und Gesellschaft* 2 (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp, 1965), p. 39.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
14. in *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, 1941, vol. 9, p. 417.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 420.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 429.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 421.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 423.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 415f.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 428f.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 424.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 426.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 433.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 436.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 435.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 437.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 438.
28. *Hegels Ontologie und die Grundlegung einer Theorie der Geschichtlichkeit* (Hegel's Ontology and the Foundation of a Theory of Historicity), (Frankfurt-am-Main: Klostermann, 1932).
29. Herbert Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon, 1968).
30. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon, 1955), p. 104.
31. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1964), p. xiv.

32. These categories unify much of Habermas' work. They are set out in sociological terms in "Technology and Science as 'Ideology,'" in his *Toward a Rational Society*. Their origins in the history of philosophy, particularly Hegel's early writings, are explained in "Arbeit und Interaktion: Bemerkungen zu Hegels Jenenser 'Philosophie des Geistes,'" in *Technik und Wissenschaft als Ideologie* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp, 1968). This is to appear in the English edition of Habermas' *Theory and Practice*. The epistemological significance of these categories is discussed in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon, 1971), and their application to the history of political and social thought can be found in *Theorie und Praxis* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1963), which will be published in English by Beacon Press.
33. On the Hegelian origins see the essay "Arbeit und Interaktion," *op. cit.* See also "Dilthey's Theory of Understanding Expression: Ego Identity and Linguistic Communication," which is Chapter 7 of *Knowledge and Human Interests*.
34. "Technology and Science as 'Ideology,'" *op. cit.*, p. 113.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
36. Jürgen Habermas, "The Idea of the Theory of Knowledge as Social Theory," Chapter 3 of *Knowledge and Human Interests*.
37. Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 308f.
38. Jürgen Habermas, "Technology and Science as 'Ideology,'" *op. cit.*, p. 87.
39. Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 309f.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 310.
41. "Toward a Theory of Communicative Competence," in Hans Peter Dreitzel, ed., *Recent Sociology No. 2: Patterns of Communicative Behavior* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 119.
42. On this subject, see not only Habermas' essay on the theory of communicative competence and "Self-Reflection as Science," Chapter 10 of *Knowledge and Human Interests*, but also the two works by Alfred Lorenzer that have heavily influenced Habermas: *Kritik des psychoanalytischen Symbolbegriffs* and *Sprachzerstörung und Rekonstruktion*, both published in Frankfurt-am-Main by Suhrkamp Verlag in 1970.
43. *Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 235f.
44. "Toward a Theory of Communicative Competence," *op. cit.*, p. 144. At the time of writing, Jürgen Habermas was preparing a series of lectures on the theory of communicative behavior to be delivered at Princeton in Spring 1971 and to be published in English.
45. See "Technology and Science as 'Ideology.'"
46. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
48. "Technology and Science as 'Ideology,'" *loc cit.*, p. 100ff. Habermas has devoted an entire book to the social and political causes and consequences

of the elimination of the liberal capitalist distinction between state and society (economy). See his *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Structural Change of the Public Realm: Investigations of a Category of Bourgeois Society), (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1969). Of particular importance is his analysis of the “refeudalization” of society.

49. “Technology and Science as ‘Ideology,’ ” p. 104ff. See also Habermas’ discussion of the labor theory of value and the role of technical knowledge and rationalization as a source of value in his “Zwischen Philosophie und Wissenschaft: Marxismus als Kritik” (Between Philosophy and Science: Marxism as Critique), in *Theorie und Praxis*, pp. 191–193.
50. “Technology and Science as ‘Ideology,’ ” p. 102ff.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 132. A detailed analysis of the student movement is to be found in the first three essays of *Toward a Rational Society*, which also contain some of Habermas’ ideas on radical education and the reform of the educational system.
54. *Reason and Revolution*, p. vii.

IV

The Post-War Response and New Beginnings

Sartre's Contribution to Marxism

Jean-Claude Girardin

Certain works seem to be self-sufficient. Their quiet density causes the thought that has been objectified in them to disappear and endows it with the appearance of a scientific discourse animated by icy discursive reason. The reader then confronts a system for which he must find the keys. *Capital* can be classified as this kind of work, and there is probably not a word to be added to this Theory of political economy in which the mechanisms of "economic things" are mercilessly laid bare. Yet, one would risk making a banal economism of Marxism if one were to reduce the class struggle, of which *Capital* seeks to give an account, to a simple effect obtained by economic forces, even if these forces are decked out as structural relations, conceived as the specific determination of dialectical and materialist history, which operate subtly at the heart of the capitalist mode of production.

This way of addressing ourselves to the problem of history brings up a question. How does one integrate the permanence of the play of economic forces into a materialist conception of history if one rejects the conditioning (considered as causality) of the latter by the former, as we have dogmatically stated at the outset? If we exclude a priori the possibility of dismissing this question, then it appears that a dialogue can be opened in which Marxism, at one moment or another during the debate, will be placed in question. Placed in question by whom? In what manner? At what level and according to what principles? Therein

lies the problem, and it is, roughly speaking, in these terms that one can formulate the strained dialogue that Jean-Paul Sartre has undertaken with Marxists for the past twenty-five years.

To speak of a dialogue is assuredly a euphemism considering how Marxists have ostracized Sartre, whom they have regarded as, at best, the theoritician of the "third way" between materialism and idealism. Can Sartre's latest writings—most notably his *Critique de la raison dialectique* and *Search for a Method*¹—change this peremptory judgment, at least to the extent that Sartre reaffirms that he is not claiming to set forth an alternative philosophy to Marxism? In these works he modestly defines himself as an "ideologue" working within Marxism, the only philosophy which, he says, cannot be transcended since the historical and social conditions that gave birth to it are still present. Is the author of *Being and Nothingness* rejecting his early works, or is he presenting us with the same thought that, in the richness of its development, has placed itself in question by means of a Marxism whose own theoretical postulates must themselves be rethought? We obviously favor the second hypothesis, and within the limited scope of these few pages shall attempt to clarify this way of posing the problem.

Unlike the work of the founders of scientific socialism, Sartre's writing requires that we grasp it not only from the outside as a whole whose internal mechanisms one tries to lay bare, but also from the inside through our complete intimacy with the process by which the author develops his thought. This means that it is possible to adhere intellectually to Marxism without becoming a militant revolutionary, or to become a revolutionary for other reasons. This disassociation turns out to be most delicate and suspicious for a reading of Sartre, for it places in question the internal dialectic of the reader's subjectivity, that is to say, his relationship with himself and the world.

On the other hand, a new difficulty arises when one considers that Sartre's thought is not limited to an analysis of subjective problems, but also spreads its corrosive influence to what can be called, for lack of a better term, the "human sciences." There is, therefore, a permanent risk that the deep meaning of his work will be betrayed if one or another aspect of it is granted privileged recognition. Sartre should not be interpreted only at the austere level of his theoretical discourse, around which his political, theatrical, and novelistic works turn. On the contrary, each

element has its own efficacy and refers to the totality of his work by modifying it in its own way. Moreover, the work remains unfinished as a whole; Sartre's voluminous and soon-to-be-published *Flaubert*, will certainly go beyond his fundamental theories by taking them up again in a richer synthesis, now some ten years after the appearance of the *Critique de la raison dialectique*. This movement of "ascending" totalization in Sartre's work takes on a dazzling character due to the fact that this same totalizing dynamic itself is continually placed in question in the form of an interrogation which, in *Being and Nothingness*, was directed at the "totalizing subject," or the concrete individual, and which, in the later writings, is grasped again and is opened up to the problematic of history, the privileged terrain of Marxism.

There is ample reason, therefore, to avoid a debate that pits Marxism against existentialism. Rather, one must attempt to show how these two philosophies, with their radically different foundations, can reciprocally influence each other. The differential space in the midst of which they function must also prevent us from making a hasty pseudosynthesis of these two systems of thought.

We shall take as our point of departure the first work in which Sartre explicitly addressed himself to Marxists, "Materialism and Revolution," written in 1946. Though it is insufficient in many aspects, this text has nonetheless the advantage of placing us immediately in the center of problems as Sartre apprehends them. In order to situate the work's political and ideological context, we should recall that for Communist intellectuals of this period, Sartre was the theoretician of the post-war outburst of bourgeois thought that was attempting to use existentialism, an offspring of idealism, to block the path of the rising philosophy—Marxism. For his part Sartre refused to be the philosopher of the lucid despair of "man abandoned by God." On the contrary, Sartre saw existentialism, because it endowed man with total responsibility, as a humanism, and the ethics he sought to institute encouraged men to engage themselves on the side of the proletariat. The misunderstanding was enormous. Undoubtedly for Sartre, Marxism remained the abstract horizon of his thought, which was only at the outset of its radicalization. The phenomenologist of *Being and Nothingness* had run up against history, and this was going to cause him to turn his thought toward action, without, however, turning it away from its fundamental concern:

establishing the theoretical basis of a dialectical anthropology, such as is foreseen at the end of *Being and Nothingness*. Through the critical reexamination of the Marxist method of posing the problem of history, this anthropology will be made more precise later in the *Critique de la raison dialectique*.

As for Sartre's adversaries, the passage of time allows us to express some doubt concerning the efficacy of the system of thought they upheld. Their Marxism had become a degraded ideology serving as a theoretical veil for the then-dominant Stalinist practice whose nefarious consequences for revolutionary thought appeared clearly only a decade later. Marxism, as a philosophy for the transformation of social relations, had bogged down by becoming institutionalized. No longer an open form of thought, it tended to close in upon itself in self-satisfaction. Revolutionary Marxism was reduced to the closed universe of "dialectical materialism." It had entered a state of crisis. And it was precisely this dialectical materialism that Sartre savagely attacked in "Materialism and Revolution," refusing to grant its claim to be the theoretical underpinning of Communist action, action to which he allied himself to the degree that he recognized in it the profound sense of Marx's work before the "destructive encounter with Engels"² (whose "dialectics of nature" Sartre considers an absurdity, and which he again attacks in the *Critique* with even more vigor). Yet Sartre's text was still abstractly philosophical and had no political repercussions. One must also say in his defense that he was confronting a mixed cartel of Marxists in which the Stalinist Garaudy rubbed elbows with the Trotskyist Naville, without mentioning Lukács, whose essay "Marxism or Existentialism" is a masterpiece of partisan polemical incomprehension of Sartre's phenomenology. In "Materialism and Revolution" Sartre thus undertook the task of showing that dialectical materialism in the orthodox acceptance is a game of trick mirrors, and that Marxists were accomplices in this deception by accepting the logical impasse to which it had led.

The basic postulate of materialism is well known: "The materialist conception of the world means a conception of nature such as it is with no extraneous addition." Sartre detected trickery in this a priori statement, and he showed that the "extraneous addition"—subjectivity, of course—that was supposed to disappear is in fact divided into two parts by the "materialists." On the one hand, it is transformed into an object which, as such, can

be studied scientifically. On the other hand, reified man is granted "the absolute truth of a vision stripped of subjective weakness," which means that he is granted the status of a *being* capable of knowing and, thus, of achieving a distanciation between himself and things. Thus a quasi-dualism of subject-object is restored. This is necessary for the production of knowledge, but only under the worst conditions, since the radical otherness of thought with regard to things, accepted by nonmaterialist philosophies, has been lost. What then can be the foundation of knowledge?

It will be replied that knowledge is based on science, whose results one can "dialectically" interpret. Psychic life, for instance, would be reduced to biology, and biology reduced to physico-chemical exchanges. In complete innocence it will be affirmed that, according to the principle of causality, quantities acting on quantities will produce syntheses that are qualitatively different from the contradictory interplay of those quantities that are sublimated in the syntheses. The materialist construction will proceed from the simple to the complex, and we shall have "dialectical syntheses" of matter in motion whose development leads us to the threshold of history. But is it really a matter of synthetic enrichment in this instance? Is there not a confusion with the shadow that one abusively casts on things? Is the term "dialectic" suitable when it is used to characterize transformations that refer to a causality that is scientific in kind? These few questions can be drawn up in a single one: is the Hegelian dialectic that Marx "placed on its feet" justified when it is made the law of the motion of things?

Sartre asked this question implicitly in "Materialism and Revolution." In the meantime he denied the Marxist claim to base themselves on both a materialistic causality and a dialectical thought that implies an action without fetters on the part of an *agent* who is ontologically capable of synthesizing. He wrote: "Marxist causality remains 'up in the air.' It can neither prop itself up with science nor hold itself up with dialectic."³ Playing upon two types of rationality, which are contradictory, dialectical materialism is seen by Sartre as only a dubious and unacceptable syncretism.

By opposing Sartre to an anemic dialectical materialism that shows at most the crisis Marxism was undergoing at the time, we seem to have given Sartre the upper hand. It should be noted in passing that this problem is taken up again in much the same

terms fifteen years later in a “controversy on dialectic,” a public debate during which Sartre confronted Marxists with his conception such as we find it in *Critique de la raison dialectique* and to which we shall return later.⁴

This discussion of “Materialism and Revolution” has allowed us to enter into Sartre’s thought through the questions it asks Marxism, without, for the time being, offering any positive answer. Sartre approached the questions of knowledge and dialectical thought from a critical perspective. The problems posed constitute what can be called the “intimate fabric” of his philosophical preoccupations, problems for which he had partial answers at this time, but for which he had not yet mastered all the data. In the same vein, “Materialism and Revolution” is a key text, for it marks the limit of the field of application of Sartre’s “early” phenomenology. We shall not summarize the second part of “Materialism and Revolution,” which announces the necessity of creating a philosophy of revolutionary action. Through this work, phenomenology “gets out of itself” in certain respects, and gives up its narrowly psychological dimension in order to come to grips with political action and history. Without really facing the concrete fabric of class struggle, in this work and others of the same period, Sartre nonetheless affirmed his desire to understand the world in order to transform it by engaging himself in it.

We must now take a quick step back in time and outline as briefly as possible the process that led Sartre to *Being and Nothingness*—the “philosophical summa” in terms of which Sartre looked at Marxism. It should be stressed that no one has seriously contested this work, and that if Sartre himself has criticized certain secondary issues in it, he still accepts its basic schemas, schemas through which his thought proceeds as though through a necessary moment toward an assumption of a dialectic of the concrete.

Sartre’s encounter with phenomenology in the 1930s confirmed his intuitions concerning the nature of consciousness. He came to the certainty that consciousness is not a reality to which the density of an intangible substance must be granted, as had been the practice of most philosophers. On the contrary, for Sartre, consciousness is not a thing but only an impersonal spontaneity. Throughout an intellectual progression that in ten years time was marked by *The Transcendence of the Ego*, the *Psychology of the Imagination*, and finally *Being and Nothingness*,

to mention only his best-known works, Sartre continually elaborated this theme. Setting himself the goal of establishing the theoretical foundations of psychology, Sartre undertook the task of defining the true relationship of consciousness with itself and with the world. In these analyses, consciousness undergoes a veritable "catharsis"; it is emptied of the objects (such as the ego) that previous philosophies had placed in it.

Sartre shows that the "I," manipulating consciousness from within, that is found in one form or another in all philosophers' works, including Husserl's, is not the irreducible unifying center of consciousness. He demonstrates that this elusive orchestra leader can only be, paradoxically, a *non-being*. Consciousness is *Nothingness* or rather the nihilation (*néantisation*) of *Being*, and human reality, the material support of this nothingness, can in no case be reduced to an object, for it is constrained to exist. One cannot say man *is*; man *exists*, and the couple "self-consciousness—consciousness of something" is given in the same, single movement that makes up our relationship with the world. Consciousness in its transparency is invested by *Being*, which it actively negates. Inversely, *Being*, which in itself is only an absurd presence, receives its status as "world" through this nothingness' sudden appearance. Consciousness, then, is the negative whose interaction with *Being* in the world gives meaning to the sheer positivity whose absurd presence Sartre had tried to analyze in his novel, *Nausea*.

This perspective, defining consciousness as always radically different from any substance, allows us to reconsider in a new light the contradictions that, as we have already seen with regard to "Materialism and Revolution," paralyzed materialism.

First, since nothing can come from nothingness, Sartre shows that there can be ontological primacy only for *Being*, in the heart of which nothingness has insidiously lodged itself, "*de facto*," as a presence-absence that is the source of all original meaning. Second, analyzing the structures of this "negative" being by means of phenomenology, Sartre restates the problems of knowledge without referring to any metaphysical postulate, be it idealistic or materialistic. And finally, since it is not a substantial reality, knowledge cannot be linearly conditioned, which means that it escapes from the (natural scientific) causality that rules over the relationships things have among themselves. Knowledge does not passively submit to the exterior forces that act upon things,

but rather becomes an irreducible self-determination of its own forces. Consciousness can only be *motivated*, not caused. Comitant with the introduction of negativity is the breaking of the causal chain in each consciousness, and this introduces in the heart of Being the possibility of a thought-action that, in one form or another, can transcend itself while at the same time going beyond the given order of things. One can recognize here, in spite of the brevity of our description, the possibility of the existence of dialectical thought. In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre does not theoretically develop this insight, but he does describe abstractly, almost in spite of himself, its inner structure. Man, he tells us, is in a perpetually unbalanced state penetrated by a double negation: he calls himself forth from the depths of a future that he is *not yet* while at the same time he transcends a past that he is *no longer*. This double negation is at one with the situation by which man temporalizes himself, causing the world to exist, and, through this double negation, giving meaning to it.

After having analyzed the structures of consciousness and the labor it does upon itself as it flees forward, Sartre extends the range of his investigation, and the austerity of the work's first part gives way to a study of concrete relations (the body, the existence of the other, etc.) in which the rigor of his schemas is brought alive through his unforgettable phenomenological descriptions of the concrete events of daily life whose ontological substrata Sartre's theory of the negative function of consciousness' giving meaning to the world lays bare.

To conclude about this fundamental work, one must not lose sight of the object it studies: consciousness in its concrete movement, grasped from within in its relationship with an immediate practical perceptual field that has not been historically determined. This absence of history limits Sartre's way of viewing problems to the boundaries of "situation" and intersubjectivity.⁵ One can easily imagine that a multiplication of the concrete consciousnesses which Sartre describes would only constitute an abstract plurality of individuals who are prisoners of a torn history which they cannot comprehend and which affects them without their knowing it. Take, for example, the relationship with objects. They are only infrequently grasped as a material that has been worked upon, and are usually considered as an objective reality apprehended by consciousness in their instrumental function. In short, men and things coexist under tension in a non-

structured field—the exact opposite of a Marxist perspective. Yet, this must not be viewed as an irremediable blemish, but rather as an indispensable theoretical mediation that will allow Sartre to come to an understanding of this structuring in its historical signification, most notably in the form of class struggle.

Sartre's personality after the war (that of the engaged intellectual whose writings punctuated the key events of our time) is more familiar. From the problems of decolonization to the war in Vietnam, passing through his disputes and polemics with the official Communist world, Sartre's stands present a series of contradictory tensions in the midst of which are refracted the contradictions of the contemporary world. Undergoing a rapprochement with the Communists at the beginning of the fifties, a break with them after Budapest, then leaning toward a leftism that is searching for itself at the end of the sixties, Sartre used his angry pen to become the "Voice" of the struggling oppressed.⁶ During this entire period his thought was being modified from within by "exteriorizing itself." His analysis of the Jewish condition, of Negritude, of colonialism, of Stalinism—through all these writings—he continually engaged in self-questioning. These are so many texts that bear witness against the first orientation of his thought. We see here a testing on a ground that was not really his, a testing through which his thought sought to get outside of itself in a continual self-questioning. The proletarian, the Jew, and the black are seen as free, but only to take upon themselves a transcendence of their condition of pariahs, which means doing something other than what history has decided for them. Sartre's descriptions, however, lack density; not that they are superficial—on the contrary, they are terribly concrete—but they seem to bear only upon a world where men are side by side and in which the interworld of things has no determining action on the antagonistic relations men are forced to maintain among themselves. Throughout, the problem of history remains the implicit horizon limiting and determining the problems posed—yet still not itself posed or understood.

Our vision is probably excessive, and it is obvious that Sartre does not cast aside as mere "exteriority" the conditioning that the capitalist process inflicts upon man's history. But one must take note of an intellectual reticence in his work whenever it is a question of situating himself on the side of "things" to the detriment of men, as Marxists so easily do. The stress on conscious-

ness, the refusal of an abstract materialism against which he had polemicized in "Materialism and Revolution," prevents Sartre from a facile acceptance of an overly mechanistic historical materialism. The reader of the works of this period can see in them the second panel of a diptych whose first panel is Marxism. The two systems seem to complete each other, one explaining what the other refuses to bring out clearly. Marxism offers an external "objectivity" underlying Sartre's violently "subjectified" demonstrations. There is a great temptation to want to synthesize these two in order to come up with a liberating existential Marxism in which "Sartre's troubling subjectivity" would function like a fish in water. To do this, however, it is necessary to find a new point of view which allows the founding of a synthesis that, in order to avoid any slide toward a metaphysical discourse, would become a theoretical expression open to the concrete reality of a history in the process of creating itself.

If one rejects the two simplistic points of view—explaining the individual entirely by history or, reciprocally, explaining history as a product of the individual—there remains the necessity of discovering the structures of the dialectical field through which, as Marx said, "men make history on the basis of previous conditions." This is the endeavor Sartre has begun in his *Critique de la raison dialectique*.⁷ In the Introduction he again takes up, though more fully, the problems outlined in "Materialism and Revolution." This time, however, the theoretical means he disposes of allow him to strain through a critical sieve the key concepts of what he calls "dogmatic dialectic," the dialectic of those Marxists who, following Engels, have changed the dialectic from a heuristic method into a transcendental law that is incapable of explaining itself and of proving the half-truths it sets forth. Sartre opposes this dialectic of "exteriority" to the method he is attempting to found. If something like a dialectical rationality exists, it will have to be experienced as a seizure of the real, insofar as reality (experience in process) is itself constituted dialectically. This perspective is ambitious; yet it does not aim at reconstituting the actual concrete movements of history, but only at discovering their rationality. Thus one must first of all study the "formal" transformations through which men's *praxis* is exchanged. These transformations enable one to grasp the intelligibility of those practical structures that bind together human aggregates. These "practical ensembles," as Sartre calls them,

must be broken down into the components that produce them. Therefore, before studying complex and living realities such as classes, human atomization, etc., it is imperative to lay bare through a regressive process the abstract and meaningful bonds that illuminate them from the interior, particularly individual *praxis* and the "practico-inert," which establish the internal conditions of "groups" and "series."

First of all, what is individual *praxis*? In *Being and Nothingness* consciousness was grasped from within as a relationship with the Self and with Being. Now, in the *Critique*, human reality is seen first of all as needs-to-fulfill. These most elementary needs (eating, breathing) depend upon the inorganic environment that surrounds the organism for their fulfillment. The organism is, thus, fundamentally "attached" to things that challenge it for its very survival. This need is a "lack" or "negation" for the organism, which must deny this "lack" by going beyond it in order to survive. Thus *praxis* in itself is a negation of a negation: it gives itself its ends in the realm of the inorganic; the organism is exteriorized in the inorganic in the same movement as it interiorizes the latter. This double movement produces *praxis* as a reality through which interiority and exteriority are joined together as a practical project. In fact, there is only a single reciprocal modification of "objectivity," since man makes himself a material force in order to adopt himself to the things he transforms. However, this reorganization passes through the mediation of interiority, which means that there exists a synthetic project that is constantly taken up again through the provisional syntheses that man must transcend. This, then, is the primordial dialectical movement, or totalization as a process.

Inversely, the multiplicity of *praxis* that are objectified by engraving their projects on things leave their imprint to the extent that "matter-as-worked-upon" becomes an anonymous crystallized *praxis*. Thus the free *praxis* of each man encounters the others' *praxis*, not in a virgin field but in a field that all have joined in structuring. Sartre calls this objective fabric of reified *praxis* the "practico-inert." In the practico-inert free *praxis* is alienated, not because it is objectified in things, but because it becomes a synthetization of multiple *praxis*: each man sees his goals forced astray by an enchanted matter that gives him back his acts in the form of results that are different from the ones he pursued. For instance, millions of Chinese peasants, each for his

own gain, clear woods in order to enlarge their parcel of cultivable land. The result of this multitude of actions undertaken in mutual ignorance is transformed into an "objective fact": the clearing of land that turns back on them as a counter-finality when the treeless land creates the possibility of giant floods which destroy the crops. No one desired this clearing of land; it came upon them all as a calamity through everyone's action: this inversion is the moment of antialectic; "matter-as-worked-upon" as a crystallization of *praxis* becomes a foreign force, escaping the project of each individual.

This reverse side of free *praxis* that comes back upon itself and undermines itself is what Sartre calls necessity. Matter-as-worked-upon turns against those who labor on it and affects their *praxis*, transparency with an opposing inertia. Man, who became an instrument in order to act upon the inorganic, discovers at this first abstract level of experience the counterfinalities of the practico-inert in a society that lives under the permanent ascendancy of scarcity. Thus while *making* himself, man is *made* in the field of the practico-inert as a demand that matter makes on those who work it. This action at a distance on the part of matter-as-worked-upon manipulates every man as the impotent member of *series*. The apparent unity of individuals is, in reality, a passive unity, a simple addition of impotencies whose rationality is not the sum of the individual goals but rather is found in the object that conditions it. Even when it is a matter of the collective (television-viewers, public transportation-users), one finds the world of the "lonely crowd" where everyone is *Other* than himself in the midst of Others who are other than themselves. Employers struggle against their competitors to defend their interests, and workers struggle among themselves on the labor market in order to survive before they will unite against their destiny which, through things, is premanufactured for them by employers' interests. In brief, at this level there is no exit, and everyone freely determines himself in the impotency of the seriality which is externally conditioned by the practico-inert, a material force which has been created, paradoxically, by everyone and no one.

The class nature of the workers is, thus, first constituted externally by the industrial complex that awaits it as a group of anonymous servants. The class is, at first, nothing more than a collection of serial *praxis*, which must be recovered in the face of this unity in things before it can burst forth as a group that

confronts intolerable necessity and discovers itself as a class in action. These anonymous *praxis*, having become *praxis-in-process*, or antidialectical, will be able to become their own unification and to find themselves in a common *praxis* through the formation of groups. The group tears itself away from the series in a revolutionary fusion, and action becomes a totalizing unification by dissolving the otherness of the series. Every *Other* becomes the *same* in and through the common action of these privileged movements, and everyone can discover in complete reciprocity his freedom as the meaning of the action of all. Dialectic again takes back its rights, and the group becomes the interiorized bond among the free *praxis* that are metamorphosed in it.

However, the action that the urgency of the situation imposes will cease or at least undergo delays; and to guard against dissolution, or a return to a state of seriality, the group will have to impose an action on itself. In order to survive it will have to organize itself and reintroduce the inertia of the series in the midst of its transparency. It will create functions, specialized subdivisions, and give itself leaders. In order to protect himself against a return to serial impotency, everyone will agree to limit his freedom as a guarantee of the freedom of the others. The group is organized in order to avoid the petrification that awaits it. To mitigate the latent demobilization that comes after mobilization, the group demands an oath of unity as a condition of survival, giving rise to the "fraternity-terror," which implies that all have the power to decide the behavior of each one. Violence is taken up by the group to defend against the external violence of necessity and the threatening return to seriality. Submitted to contradictory tensions, the group can then disappear or become institutionalized. In the second case, the moment of individual freedom will be set aside for the benefit of the "objective" existence of the group. However this may be, the group cannot become a "thing," any more than it can become a hyperorganism endowed with hyperconsciousness. Within these limits the destiny of the group will be played out, if it survives. Finally, it will become serialized, thus re-creating the conditions for the appearance of new groups.

Sartre, thus, restores for us the metamorphoses of *praxis*. By joining together and being destroyed, series and groups spin out the complexities of a social structure and constitute the abstract framework of the concrete history that men live under the

reign of scarcity. A dialectical circularity, established by individual *praxis* within the limits of the practico-inert, is thus obtained. The regressive analysis is completed. It has permitted us to grasp the synchronic intelligibility of practical structures. It now demands, as a second step, a synthetic progression which will restore the "double synchronic and diachronic moment through which history is unceasingly totalizing itself."⁸ This will be the goal of the second volume of *Critique de la raison dialectique*. By thus re-establishing negativity in the center of dialectical materialism, Sartre has endowed it with intelligibility. There remains the task of considering his work as a skeletal methodology necessary for a Marxist comprehension of history. In his progress from "consciousness" to "praxis," Sartre has encountered necessity. This necessity, in the form of the alienation of *praxis*, can only be transcended by a *praxis* that is recovered in the midst of necessity. Sartre's thought presents therefore his first reply to the philosophy of revolutionary action he promised at the end of "Materialism and Revolution." It remains to give this philosophy its practical mediations, which can only be the work of those engaged in the class struggle.

Translated by Allen Thiher

Notes

1. For all biographical or bibliographical information, as well as for an accurate approach to the intellectual climate surrounding Sartre, we recommend the invaluable work of Michel Contant and Michel Rybalka, *Les écrits de Sartre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970).
2. "Materialisme et révolution," in *Situations*, vol. III (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 213n.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
4. Published in *Marxisme et existentialisme*, (Paris: Plon, 1962).
5. Although it is not accurate to call Sartre's philosophy a philosophy of the "subject," since any reference to an "I" is excluded, one must nonetheless note that this work gave rise to a series of individual "conversions," all tainted with subjectivism, which were the source of a mode, existentialism, for which Sartre was, a bit in spite of himself, the high priest.
6. It is not possible to discuss Sartre's different positions in detail here. The reader is referred to Michel-Antoine Burnier's *Choice of Action*, which

analyzes the evolution of the journal, *Les Temps Modernes*, of which Sartre has been the director since its foundation in 1946.

Sartre's influence within and without France cannot be understated. The theoretical and rhetorical vigor with which he defended the cause of freedom in articles, polemics, and manifestoes, and in his novels, plays, and short stories, had an impact far beyond the limits of those who had read *Being and Nothingness* and his other theoretical works. Sartre's insistence on the necessity of *Freedom*, and his application of this postulate to concrete analyses of contemporary social issues—from the Indo-China, Algerian, Cuban, and Vietnamese revolutions to the situation of the individual in the contemporary world—was influential in the contemporary redefinition of social revolution. Sartre was not simply a “voice” crying in the wilderness; his passion was also the theoretical reflection of the qualitative demand for freedom.

7. This voluminous and dense work (390,000 words) published in 1960 is the result of research Sartre undertook throughout the fifties. It is now being translated into English. This work develops concepts that are implicitly contained in *Search for a Method*, an essay which is an introduction to *Critique de la raison dialectique*, while at the same time it offers in advance certain conclusions. Since it is available in English, we shall leave aside *Search for a Method* so as to be able to devote a few pages just to the *Critique*. (Cf. *Search for a Method*, translated by Hazel Barnes, [New York. Alfred Knopf, 1963].)
8. *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 754.

Henri Lefèvre and Contemporary Interpretations of Marx

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In recent years the literature that has appeared about, for, and against Marx and Marxism has increased to the point where it can hardly be surveyed. Yet it would be false to conclude that the debate over matters of content has been advanced. To the extent that this literature does not speak the language of the Cold War and attempt to establish a dubious "counter ideology," it produces (as political science or Kreminology) works full of information concerning the state of Soviet Marxist doctrines in terms of their dependence on current political trends. To the extent that Marxian theory itself still enters its field of vision, it is dulled by the fact that people (generally following Karl Löwith) classify it in the historical tradition of Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, or else reduce it to an ahistorical interpretation of the problematic of alienation in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*.

On the other hand, the group of authors honestly interested in the further development of Marxian theory is exceptionally small. They are able to abstract from what still frequently passes for Marxism in the Eastern half of the world without denying the objective significance of the East-West conflict for their thought. They have involved themselves intensively with texts of Hegel

and Marx, which by no means have finally been disposed of, without falling into the hair-splitting ontology—with its consecrated body of quotations—that is typical for the post-Stalinist period in Soviet philosophy. To this group belongs Henri Lefèvre (who has recently become known in Germany through his acute analysis of Stalinism¹). His writings are indispensable to those who aim at an adequate (and therefore critical) understanding of Marx within the limits of the alternatives that have been institutionalized in the political arena: either calling dialectical materialism a “watertight world view” (Musil) or dismissing it out of hand as a product of the discredited nineteenth century.

If a publisher has decided to bring out an edition of *Le matérialisme dialectique*,² a work that appeared over three decades ago, it is because it has scarcely lost its actuality—aside from a few points that needed correction. The philosophical discussion of Marxism that began directly after the First World War with Bloch's *Spirit of Utopia* and Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, and was especially furthered by Korsch, H. Marcuse, Horkheimer, and Adorno, broke off with Hitler's seizure of power. Therefore, works on Marx from that period, as well as those written in western Europe in the late thirties, are still of great importance to us: not least because those works approached problems in a way far more political and closer to reality than was possible for the new West German attempts at an interpretation of Marx after 1945, which remained more or less academic. These were all essentially centered on the “young Marx,” in whom the authors (Thier, Popitz, Fromm) wanted to see an “existential thinker.”

Since Lefèvre's book also seems at first glance to belong to the existence-philosophical, moralizing, and abstract anthropological school of interpretation, it seems necessary to make the reader somewhat more conversant with Lefèvre's intellectual development.³ Only on that basis can the central concept of “alienation” in his *Dialectical Materialism* be understood and differentiated from interpretations using this concept in a sense almost exactly opposed to the Marxian one.

First, some dates in pre-World War II French philosophy. About the year 1930, the *philosophical* aspect of Marxism began to arouse interest in France. At the same time, a broad general receptivity toward Hegel, interwoven with attitudes toward Kierkegaard, was announced by Jean Wahl's book, *Le malheur*

de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel. Wahl is inclined to reduce the richness of Hegel's work to the stage of the "unhappy consciousness." With this emphasis on the romantic moment in Hegel, it becomes almost impossible to separate Hegel and Kierkegaard. Subsequently, the appropriation of the idealist dialectic is paralleled by an interpretation of Marx's early writings in the light of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. This process led to the birth of the French variety of existential ontology: to Existentialism. It was completed between 1933 and 1938, years in which Alexandre Kojève gave his now famous lectures on the *Phenomenology of Mind*⁴ at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes before students such as Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, R. Aron, and R. P. Fessard. These lectures follow the same questionable lines as Wahl and see access to Hegel's entire *oeuvre* in a single level of consciousness. With Kojève, it is the much-commented-on chapter "Dependence and Independence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage." Although he wants his interpretation of Hegel to be considered "Marxist," he does not focus on Marx's materialist "inversion" of the dialectic. Rather, as Fetscher emphasizes, Kojève already sees in the phenomenological dialectic *itself*, "all the ultimate consequences of the Marxist philosophy of history."⁵ Thus "motifs of thought" that first arose from Marx's critique of Hegel are ascribed to Hegel. But even Marx's position is not done justice, since Kojève lags behind his claim that one should elevate oneself to real history, that is, to the concrete forms of human relationships, which are determined differently at different moments in time. Instead, he is satisfied with the sterile definition of a Heideggerian "historicity of existence" that is supposedly present in the *Phenomenology of Mind* as an "existential"⁶ and radically "finite"⁷ anthropology. According to Kojève, the anthropological character of Hegelian thought becomes understandable only on the basis of Heidegger's emphasis on "ontological finitude," although the anthropology of *Being and Time* (which Kojève asserts in opposition to Heidegger's intention) adds nothing new to that developed by Hegel.

The supposedly broader "anthropological-ontological basis"⁸ with which Kojève wants to dote dialectical materialism is more liable to reduce it to a doctrine of invariable structures. Not the least of the ways that this would develop is in strictly political terms. Insofar as Kojève breaks the structural elements of the Master-Slave dialectic away from its specific historical background

(which must always be thought of with it), he inflates labor and the struggle for life and death into eternal factors, *à la* social Darwinism. Stripped of every concrete determination, man appears as an essence "which is always conscious of his death, often freely assumes it and sometimes knowingly and freely chooses it"; Hegel's "anthropological philosophy" is viewed as "ultimately one . . . of death."⁹ Anachronistically, and thus in a way that falsifies Hegel, Kojève equates the struggle for "recognition" with a "fight for pure prestige."¹⁰ Human essence and knowledge constitutes itself with a decided "risk" of life. It is as if "self conscious existence is possible only where there are or—at least—where there have been bloody fights, wars for prestige."¹¹ On the other hand, it matters little that he abstractly holds firm to the idea of the "realm of freedom" that Hegel anticipated and that has to be realized by Marxism.¹² It is a reconciled condition that does not occupy a situation, in which negativity (time and action in their present meanings) ceases, as do philosophy, revolutions and wars as well: his "political-existential" anthropology sharpened by "decisionism" bears fascistoid traces.¹³

If one starts from the premise that the Hegel and Marx exegesis outlined here was dominant in the France of the thirties, it becomes clear that Lefèvre, even with all the unavoidable concessions to the spirit of the times, took a path all his own. Opposed to every ontology, to the late-bourgeois as well as to the Stalinist ones, he developed himself into a critical Marxist whose standards grew out of a materialist analysis of the course of history. His academic teachers were hardly appropriate to lead his thought in this direction. In Aix-en-Provence he studied Augustine and Pascal¹⁴ with the liberal Catholic Maurice Blondel, and at the Sorbonne he worked with Léon Brunschvig, the "intellectualistic" philosopher of judgment who was an enemy of every dialectic. What made Lefèvre (by no means without conflict) turn to Marxism had little to do with university philosophy. It was the political and social upheavals of the postwar period, and more particularly personal problems, psychoanalysis, and association with the literary and artistic avant-garde, the surrealist movement.¹⁵ Lastly, it was the suspicion, which turned into a firm conviction, that philosophy as it had been handed down to us had demonstrated that it increasingly was less able to come to grips with, not to mention master, the problems posed by the historical situation of being and consciousness in society. At this point, the

call of Marx and Engels, in their early writings, for the “negation” of philosophy and the turn toward a *praxis* “which would realize philosophical insight,” seemed to offer itself to him. A possibility seemed to open up, not only of more or less articulately mirroring the fragmentation developing in modern existence—the way it happened in irrationalist ideologies—but of grasping it concretely, that is, as something which could be transcended.

Thus, from the outset, Lefèvre’s Marxism is neither the positivistically limited one of the natural scientist who seeks to satisfy the needs of his world view, nor that of the practical politician to whom it is simply a means of rationalizing specific measures. Fetscher correctly indicates that fact,¹⁶ but when he sees the specificity of Lefèvre’s view of Marx in *anthropology*, more discussion is required, so as to avoid the misunderstandings that lie close at hand in such an interpretation.

First of all, as critical theoreticians in general have repeatedly emphasized, Marx is not concerned with a “philosophical anthropology” in Scheler’s sense of static precepts concerning the “construction of the essence of Man.” Such an anthropology sets the impossible task of demonstrating the exact manner in which “all specific monopolies, achievements and works of mankind proceed” from a “basic structure of the human being,” including history and society, which, characteristically enough, Scheler handles in the rigidified form of “historicity” and “socialicity.”¹⁷ However much anthropological writers have tried to incorporate change and becoming into the idea of human nature, the content of the history of this idea must, nevertheless, remain external to these concepts, because the way they pose the question is based on a strictly conceived hierarchy.

Marx is equally little concerned with probing the eternal structure of human labor in the manner of his fundamental-ontological interpreters who, like Kojève, also want to end up with an anthropology that is basically foreign to history. What emerges in Marx as the generally valid structure of human labor is a concept fixed by thought, in which conditions common to all stages of production can be determined. “But,” says the *Critique of Political Economy*, “the so-called *general conditions* of all production are nothing but abstract moments with which no actual historical stage of production can be grasped.”¹⁸ This position by no means typifies only Marx’s economic analyses. Precisely those early writings, which are always quoted in order to treat

Marx as an ontologist, yield little for such an interpretation. Thus the *German Ideology* stresses that by presenting the practical life-processes of men (not of *man*), independent philosophy loses its "medium of existence" and can be replaced at best by a "summing-up of the most general results, abstractions which arise from the observation of the historical development of men."¹⁹ To that sentence, Marx and Engels unequivocably add:

Viewed apart from real history, these abstractions have in themselves no value whatsoever. They can only serve to facilitate the arrangement of historical material, to indicate the sequence of its separate strata. But they by no means afford a recipe or schema, as does philosophy, for neatly trimming the epochs of history.²⁰

As if the authors of these sentences had never written them, the ontologizing interpreters of Marx resolutely make what are explicitly referred to as helpful *concepts*, the results of the analysis of materials, precede the materials as their constituent being. No differently did Nietzsche's *Götzendämmerung* brand the $\pi\rho\hat{\omega}\tau\sigma\psi\epsilon\hat{\nu}\delta\sigma$ [primary lie—Eds.] of the metaphysical enterprise. Under the guise of radicalizing historical consciousness, history is eliminated. All that remains of it is that it exists: historicity.

Lefèvre criticized both of these methodologically interrelated lines of interpretation, and not least of all Kojève's "neo-Hegelian deviation,"²¹ in which the "anthropological" and the "ontological" are linked. He exposed the weaknesses of German existential philosophy (Jaspers),²² no less than those of French existentialism and its Husserlian-Heideggerian roots.²³ This fundamental opposition is not weakened by the occasional resonances of an existential vocabulary in Lefèvre's writings. He does not infringe on its materialist character, yet for him Marxism is not a philosophy of being, but a philosophy of concept.

The fact that in retrospect Lefèvre now terms his 1925 attitudes "existentialist" should not be understood in the sense of the term established later. Rather, it means that he and his friends, under the pressures of the conditions of the time and the sterility of official philosophy, wrestled with problems which immediately affected their mental (and not only mental) existence. Day-to-day personal experience exposed the limits that were set by the bourgeois world on the free development of human talents and needs, and showed the extent to which modern society

suffered from a fragmented self, which the young Hegel had already called the “fountainhead of the needs of philosophy.”²⁴

Granted, the critique of this fragmentation that Lefèvre undertook during the years 1925–1929 did not yet fulfill the criteria which he later developed in the idea of a “critique of everyday life.” To the extent that it does not disappear into the abstract immediacy of mere revolt, it remains caught in just that scholastic philosophy of whose insufficiency, as we have said, no one was more conscious than Lefèvre himself. During those years, even he succumbed to the cult of the increasingly impoverished self—a “withdrawal neurosis,”²⁵ which could grow to the point at which the inner self is entirely cut off from the outer world and robbed of all content, is driven toward its own self-destruction at the same time that it claims to be concerned with human well-being. At the same time, Lefèvre’s withdrawal into pure interiority—more a symptom than a critique of what exists—is streaked with the slowly dawning insight that the world does not exhaust itself in Bergson’s stream of consciousness, that what matters is finding one’s way back to objects: “*Retrouver l’objet.*”²⁶

However, Lefèvre’s desire to escape from the bind of cramped subjectivity and to attain a more concrete medium of thought was not realized immediately. When he adhered to Communism in 1928, he saw less clearly than before. True, in 1930 he read Hegel, and Marx’s *Capital*. But at first, the books that were decisive, as for many Marxist neophytes, were Engel’s *Anti-Dühring* and Lenin’s *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*—books which, because of their materialist overzealousness, teach a massive objectivism rather than a scientific objectivity thoroughly penetrated by concepts. It is understandable that after adopting these dogmatic positions, Lefèvre also interpreted the later Engels’ statements on previous philosophy (which are in fact ambiguous) to mean that socialist theory, as a “positive science,” abjures *all* philosophy. Thus, materialism becomes synonymous with a strict renunciation of abstraction. When Lefèvre became aware of the contradiction contained in that position, namely that if one totally rejects abstraction (in particular, we must add, the theory of the equivalency of exchange, which is decisive for Marx), it is impossible to justify the scientific use of concepts, then conflicts with the Party became inevitable. Since the late twenties, the Party had been concerned with its “Bolshevization.” Under the pretense of adopting the Leninist organizational model, it was

forming an apparatus to which, with Stalin's increasing influence over non-Russian Parties, every intellectual effort was ruthlessly subordinated.

One must start from this fundamental process of transformation of the French Communist Party in order to judge adequately the works Lefèvre published between 1930 and 1940. They were against both modern authoritarian, irrational ideology²⁷ and against the attempts of Party Communists to either reduce Marx's teachings to a narrowly conceived economicistic theory, or to broaden them into a positive world view ("scientific ideology") and an abstract methodology of the natural sciences. Lefèvre, similar to Karl Korsch in that respect, is not merely concerned with "situating" Marxism within philosophy or within science, since Marxist speculative philosophy transcends the empiricism of all the individual sciences. Lefèvre knows that the way philosophy and science merge into the specifically Marxist concept of a *critique* is discontinuous and, therefore, it qualitatively changes them. That this *critique* claims to be a science not only does not stand in opposition to philosophy, it rests precisely on a philosophical distinction: that between immediacy and reflexion, appearance and essence.

These are categories linked with the name of Hegel. Lefèvre explicitly rejoined Hegel's dialectic when in the early thirties he turned to questions of logic and of (historical) method, to the problem of "real humanism" and to the theory of ideological illusion. At that point, just as Lukács had done previously in *History and Class Consciousness*, he came up against the problem of the *objective* meaning of the Hegelian method for the Marxist one. He recognizes that this problem can be approached adequately only when the historical character of the Marxist method, energetically stressed by Lukács, is applied not only to its objects, but also to itself. In other words: neither for Marx nor for us is this method a materialist corrective of Hegel that is given once and for all. Just as Marx (and this is not simply a philological question) evaluated his relation to Hegel quite differently at different stages of development, we must also reinterpret afresh the Hegel-Marx relation with respect to continuity and discreteness, and according to the state of history and the nature of our theoretical interests that are determined by it. Thus something like a well-rounded "Marxist image of Hegel" is impossible for Lefèvre.²⁸

He considers Hegel's *Logic* and *Phenomenology* from the

viewpoint of a materialist philosophy of history which, as a "science of human reality,"²⁹ takes up in their transitory, historically concrete determinations those questions that can be hypothesized from philosophical anthropology and the "existential" movement and applied as such to a man in general. Because Lefèvre also terms the Marxist science of human reality a "general anthropology,"³⁰ it seems necessary to return to Fetscher's statement concerning the basically *anthropological* character of his understanding of Marx, especially because we have tried to describe the way the anthropological-ontological interpretation of Marx deviates from the position of both Marx and of Lefèvre.

As we have said, Lefèvre's concept of anthropology does not aim at a supratemporal substance; for him man is contained in what Marx calls "the world of men, state, society,"³¹ that is, in an historical relationship that must, in turn, be examined in its present concrete form. The general human essence is whatever it is in its particular manifestation; this essence, however, presents itself at a particular stage of the conflict between man and nature. Perhaps one should say: at this stage, the stage of "prehistory," it is what it is *not*—an unfilled promise.

In two respects, this radical historical and philosophical conception of anthropology serves a polemical function for Lefèvre. First, he needs it to render conceivable the work the concept has to do epistemologically, in terms of the "materiality" presupposed by dialectical materialism. In addition, it is opposed to the gross reduction of the critique of political economy into economism.

Marx stands in opposition to the metaphysical theses of the later Engels, canonized by Stalin and Soviet Marxism, that Nature as it existed before any human or social intervention, contains a dialectical movement; in opposition also to Lenin's attempt to "define" matter as a reality independent of consciousness and to view cognition as a copy of reality. For Marx the materialist, dialectical categories exist only as nodal points in historical *praxis*, that is, in a material reality that is continually being mediated through human actions that also belong to the material and objective world. Only this is "negativity"—"a moving and producing principle."³² It was not Marx's job to "fix" gnosiologically the materials worked by labor, and in which labor is incorporated: the specific determination of materials is just as much a passing moment of the production process as is their very disappearance. Every mediating act reconstitutes in a higher form the immediacy that it destroyed.

The necessity, expressed for the first time by the early Lukács, of limiting the validity of the dialectic to the historical and social world³³ has since then become the unspoken presupposition of every serious interpretation of Marx.³⁴ Lefèvre could never be on good terms with a “materialism of the isolated object.” He always considered any concept of the material world that did not include its practical (or at least potentially practical) appropriations as a pure abstraction. Since Marxism was taught in its Stalinized codification for decades, thinkers such as Sartre,³⁵ for whom the *sacrificium intellectus* was too great, hesitated to adopt it for an unnecessarily long time.

The aspect of what Lefèvre calls anthropology, which is directed against economism, is also a critique of naïve-realistic consciousness.

Even Marx himself, and not just his vulgarizers, occasionally falls into the error of raising what he opposes to a methodological norm—the reification of human relationships. His presenting the primacy of a negative totality over individuals suddenly turns into a kind of taking sides in favor of that totality. The reified power of historical-economic processes, their objectively alienated aspect, swallows up the subjective human side, which is then taken into consideration only under the heading of “ideological reflexes and echoes.”³⁶ The specifically social manifestations disappear into their economic essence. Lefèvre, not incorrectly, believes that he remains true to the idea of a *critique* of political economy when he underlines the irreducibility of human and social spheres to the economic one.³⁷ That idea consists of not capitulating to the “natural” objectivity of the historical process as a whole. Marxian dialectic derives its claim to a greater objectivity in comparison with classical economists precisely from the fact that it defetishizes the world of commodities; that is, it reveals the subjective mediations of that world.

Whereas by “ideology” Marx meant primarily the realm of phenomena of consciousness as split off from *praxis*, in today’s society the rigid differentiation between economic and non-economic factors has become questionable. Today the apparatus, which, despite its centrifugal tendencies, functions more and more smoothly, is already ideological. It is this apparatus that has not only shrunken human consciousness, even the unconscious, down to its mere mirror image, but also has atrophied its general modes of behavior, primarily in the area of the consumer. The analysis of that area³⁸ should not be left to operational social behaviorism.

For Lefèvre it is a section of a comprehensive "theory of everyday life"³⁹ that attempts to enrich Marxism (frequently subjected to economicistic simplifications) with a previously neglected *sociological* dimension.

We now turn to Lefèvre's extensive study of the concept of alienation, which made him famous to a degree matched by scarcely another philosopher. From what has been said of his use of the term "anthropology," it should be clear that for him (as little as for Marx), there is no question of rigidly fixing in a few formulae the relationship between society, the individual and nature. Thus, alienation must be redefined according to the historical constellation in which those elements interact; namely from the point of view of its "*Aufhebung*."

Lefèvre's transition to socialism recapitulated the stages of Marx's "self-understanding" to the extent that his categories, like those of Marx, become progressively more concrete. Lefèvre's independent development into a Marxist theoretician began with his study of the 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, discovered in 1931, which in spite of their abstractness already had substantially more content than the then "official" materialist ontology. His study of the Marx of the Paris period found expression in what is certainly Lefèvre's most important book from the thirties: *Dialectical Materialism*,⁴⁰ written in 1934–1935, published in 1938.

The book had to have been rejected within the Party, if only because it appeared at the same time as the *History of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union(B)*, which contained the chapter written by Stalin, "On Dialectical and Historical Materialism." During the period of Stalin's rule, this was clearly an obligatory text and, correspondingly, was quoted often. Whereas for Marx, historical and dialectical materialism (though he never used the expressions) had an identical content, and whereas he always objected to the "abstract materialism of the natural sciences . . . which excludes the historical process,"⁴¹ with Stalin the theory (degraded to a "world view") was dogmatically divided into dialectical and historical materialism, the latter being simply a special case of the former, which had to do with the most general laws governing the development of matter. Nature and history are both frozen into things in themselves: the constitutive role of human *praxis* for the changing "objectivity" (and, thus, the cornerstone of Marxian dialectic) remained uncomprehended.

It is understandable that Lefèvre's book, which explicitly spelled out this last point and only granted validity to that objectivity whose character as product is perceived clearly, had come into conflict with a doctrine that invokes an immediacy unpenetrated with reflection, yet which, nonetheless, still boasts of itself as being scientific. At a point when the Party glorified the seven miserable "basic characteristics" of the dialectic and of materialism, which Stalin enumerated like a catalogue, as the high point of Marxist thought, such a view had to sow confusion since it destroyed the "clarity" that had been attained by the cataloguers.

In *Dialectical Materialism*, Lefèvre follows an eminently philosophical intention.⁴² In the face of the institutionalized simplifications of the theory introduced by Stalinism and of its antagonism to humanity, he stresses the critical, humanistic impulse of the theory. The fact that his starting point is the 1844 *Manuscripts* does not at all imply a devaluation of the economic problematic, as it does in the case of those interpreters for whom Marx's work falls into "two parts which cannot be linked in any meaningful principled way."⁴³ On the contrary, Lefèvre views Marx's development as a unified process in which the theme of "alienated labor" as well as its ideological derivatives, are handled more and more concretely from stage to stage; from Marx's book against Proudhon to the *Theory of Surplus Value*, there are no (economic in the more strict sense) texts that he does not cite. The fact that he holds firmly to this unified point of view should be appraised all the more highly since he did not have available the *Outline of the Critique of Political Economy*, the 1857–1858 "rough draft" ("Rohentwurf") for the *Critique of Political Economy*, which was published for the first time in Moscow in 1939 and 1941.⁴⁴ He could not see a text nearly a thousand pages thick, which, in terms of the history of Marx's development, establishes the link between the 1844 *Manuscripts* and the developed materialist economics of the middle and mature Marx. The rough draft—still "philosophical" and already "economic"—is more appropriate than any other of Marx's texts to place the discussion of the relationship of Marxism to Hegel's philosophy on a broader footing, since Marx himself, in his forewords and postfaces, often expresses himself unclearly and gives only sparse results on this score. It also speaks for Lefèvre that he saw that with the preparatory work to the 1859 *Critique of Political Economy*, Marx began a second, far more positive approach to Hegel. The dialec-

tical method is necessary to really grasp as a system the structural relationships between the categories that bourgeois economists have presented merely as empirical results, to transcend them critically.⁴⁵ As Lefèvre shows, this method has to derive the alienation that at first appears only abstractly in the products and the activity of the worker from the specifically *social* character that products and activities assume in capitalism; that is, in a totality that is just as much an objective structure as it is a movement that would not exist without the conscious will and purpose of men. Naturally the insight that through their activity men continually bring forth just those conditions to which they are subjected at first appears only to the theoretical consciousness. In everyday *praxis*, on the other hand, “individuals are subsumed under social production, which exists as if it were a destiny outside them; but social production is not subsumed under the individuals who manage it as their common property.”⁴⁶ All of Lefèvre’s work, including *Dialectical Materialism*, takes up the task of revealing the illusory character of this social objectivity. Evolved through practice, it can only be dissolved through practice. But, Lefèvre might be asked, what about the possibility of the dissolution (*Aufhebung*) of alienation, of a realization of the total man, if alienated conditions—which Marx still presupposes in *The German Ideology*—cease to be an “intolerable power against which men make a revolution?”⁴⁷ Even under the conditions of effective competition, private interests were socially determined from the start and could be pursued only in a given framework. And yet the gap between the interior and the exterior remained based on competition, which presupposed a minimum of individual consistency. Today, in the age of one-dimensional thought and relations (H. Marcuse), the relatively spontaneous procedure of “introjecting” the exterior into the interior through a self that can also oppose the exterior world is hardly possible any longer. Men identify themselves immediately with the social whole, which tends to reduce all opposition to silence with its oppressive abundance of goods.⁴⁸ What becomes of the multiple subjective forms of alienation (aesthetic, psychological), which Lefèvre has examined in all his books, and whose “positive,” that is, critical, side is only now coming to light, when society directly incorporates whole sectors of the superstructure into its political-economic process? Don’t they have to disappear if the individual’s identification with the life-styles imposed on him

reproduces itself mechanically? What epistemological value does the concept of alienation still possess when alienation has objectified itself as reality in such a way that it deprives men of the possibility of revealing it as, in Hegel's term, a "disappearing appearance"? Marx's critical reformulation of Feuerbach's conception of alienation refers to *The Phenomenology of Mind*, which implies, albeit idealistically, that man, essentially "self-consciousness," has been capable of grasping his own torn and shattered condition (and thus that of his world) and "with this knowledge" has raised himself above this fragmentation.⁴⁹ But already in Hegel, self-consciousness can manage to achieve this "only when revolting." Though materialist theory does not share the Hegelian belief that a conflict which has become conscious is one which has been concretely mastered, it still presupposes that the transition from the "class in itself" to the "class for itself" first takes place in individual thought, and only then do "knowledge" and "action" become one in collective *praxis*. Marx's pre-1848 revolutionary humanism assumes a fairly high (and increasing!) degree of independence of subjective forms of reflection from the relationships supporting them: the real possibility of becoming enraged. The possibility of revolt is minimized by the subsequent course of history—not by the developed critique of political economy. The latter's insistence on the strict objectivity of the process as a whole signifies more a qualitatively new level of capitalism than a "scientific" detour away from the needs of the individual. Nietzsche underscores the findings of Marx's analysis of commodities when, in *The Will to Power*, he makes the supposition that consciousness may well become more and more dispensable in the future and is "perhaps destined to disappear and to make place for a full-fledged automatism."⁵⁰ As opposed to that notion, Lefèvre's conception of alienation seems harmless, because it holds all too firmly to the continuity of the prerequisites of individualistic society, which were already becoming debatable in the second half of the previous century. He overlooks the fact that theory must abstract from individuals to the extent that they become mere "personifications of economic categories."⁵¹

Thus, Lefèvre is one of the few authors who do not erect a Chinese wall between Marx's youthful and his mature work, and who examine both the "philosophical" motives of the economic writings as well as the "economic" motives of the philosophical works. He rightly sees that the appropriate path leading to ques-

tions concerning the discipline of historical and dialectical materialism is to be found in the presentation of the *history of its origins*.⁵² This in turn is not separable from the history of the subject of its investigation: bourgeois society, a *concretum* in which every historical process is summed up. Marx, who starts from the fact that "economics" must first be created "as a science in the German sense of the term,"⁵³ describes his task in the following way: "The work in question . . . is the critique of economic categories, or . . . the critical presentation of the system of bourgeois economics. It is at the same time the presentation of the system and through the presentation the critique of the system."⁵⁴

Lefèvre's writings do take the Marxian *desideratum* of the "presentation" of theory extremely seriously. There are several reasons why he leaves open many problems when questions about developing the flow of the total capital of society according to its adequate "concept" come up; why he hesitates to express the systemic character of the world without reservations.

For one thing, he lets himself be guided by the philosophical notion of the indissolubility of the universe into concepts that grasp it, apart from the fact that every system tends to destroy the specific content of the individual being, which is what ultimately matters. For Marx, it is not primarily a question of the universe in a metaphysical sense, but of a universe of facts that are mediated through the *negative* totality of society. Insofar as society is grounded in the abstract generality of exchange, and to that extent resembles an idealistic system, it remains linked to the natural form of human labor power and its products, that is, to qualitatively determined use value.

For another thing, the system of economic categories Marx had in mind is by no means present in a single form in his writings: if it were, a self-contained presentation of the system would be possible without difficulty. Thus, the analysis of forms of commodities as value, capital, and money, consists only in fragmentary formulations.

Third, and lastly—and this is the most important aspect—under current historical conditions, which are much different from those that Marx understood as capitalism, every systematic presentation of the critique of political economy must contain its own metacritique.

However great the objective difficulties in bringing the economic critique to the point required today, the existence of its

object cannot be doubted. Now, as before, progress has the character of a “density” that “exists” outside man and that is as yet unmastered. Only in this way can we explain why for Lefèvre (similarly to Bloch, we may add) the critical meditation on science, to which Marxism once imagined to have raised itself, returns to utopia. It is as if reality refused itself to critical thought to such a degree that it can only stand in a negative relation to it. An historically unambiguous mediation between the bad that exists and the better that is possible is not present. It is not by accident that Lefèvre has recourse to the romantic-sounding concept of “total man,” as it was used by the young Marx at a time when he had not yet theoretically mastered the content of history. Today, when it appears that we are no longer masters of this content, that concept is again necessary in order not to fall into sheer historicism, in order to hold firm to the *telos* of a rationally installed humanity.

Translated by John Heckman

Notes

1. Henri Lefèvre, *Probleme des Marxismus, heute* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1965).
2. *Dialectical Materialism*, edited by Grossman (London: Cape, 1968). [Schmidt's essay originally appeared as an “Afterword” to the German edition of this work.]
3. He describes its stages exhaustively in the second volume of his extraordinary, part essayistic, part lyrical, part autobiographical work, *La somme et le reste* (Paris: 1959), under the title “L’itinéraire,” pp. 357–559 (Cf. also Lefèvre’s self-presentation in the anthology *Les philosophes français d’aujourd’hui* [Paris: 1963], pp. 282–300.) A preliminary summary is offered in Iring Fettscher’s essay, although it is more than a decade old, “Der Marxismus im Spiegel der französischen Philosophie,” in: *Marxismusstudien*, Schriften der Studiengemeinschaft der Evangelischen Akademien, vol. 3 (Tübingen, 1954), cf. especially pp. 175–182. On Lefèvre’s position after his exclusion from the Party, cf. my postscript to *Probleme des Marxismus, heute*, *op. cit.*, pp. 135–145. Also instructive is Gianni Barba’s essay, “Bibliographische Notizen zum Werk von Henri Lefèvre,” in: *Neue Kritik* (August 1965), Heft 31: 24–28.
4. *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* edited by R. Queneau (Paris: 1947). An abridged version exists in English: *Introduction to the Reading of*

Hegel, edited by Allan Bloom (N.Y.: Basic Books, 1969). In addition to Kojève, Jean Hyppolite is especially responsible for the reception—mediated through existentialism—of Hegel into French consciousness. Even Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* is unthinkable without Hegel's *Logic*. On French Hegelianism in general, cf. Iring Fettscher, "Hegel in Frankreich," in *Antares*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1952).

5. Fettscher, *Der Marxismus im Spiegel der französischen Philosophie*, p. 183.
6. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, p. 219.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
8. Kojève, *Hegel. Versuch einer Vergegenwärtigung seines Denkens* (German translation of the above), Editor's preface, p. 9.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
10. *Introduction to Hegel*, p. 41.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 41
12. *Ibid.*, p. 157ff.
13. This critical characterization of Kojève in no way detracts from his great services in the Marxist reinterpretation of Hegel (especially the *Phenomenology of Mind*) in this century. However—and it is this point that we are criticizing—Kojève's thought is prejudiced by the fact that he understands Hegel and Marx in terms of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, which, among other things, results in his falling back to the position of an ahistorical Feuerbachianism, which Marx left early in his career. In that he isolates and hypostatizes categories like "struggle," "war," and "prestige," he comes close to that which, under the rubric "political anthropology," belongs in the European prehistory of right-wing authoritarian thought. Hence, the expression 'faschistoid.' (Author's note for the American edition.)
14. Pascal's relation to Jansenism is the subject of his doctoral thesis. Later Lefèvre devoted a two volume study to Pascal which is of great methodological interest: *Pascal* (Paris: 1949 and 1954).
15. In 1925, during the heroic phase of surrealism, when Breton was attempting a sort of "popular front" between Left intellectuals and organizations friendly to the Communists, Lefèvre, who then, along with Georges Politzer, Norbert Guterman, Georges Friedmann and Pierre Morhange, belonged to the group *Philosophies*, which was as yet by no means Marxist-materialist oriented, came into contact with the *Centrale surréaliste*. A contact which without doubt furthered Lefèvre's politicization and broke off only in 1929, when he fully adhered to Communism with Morhange and Politzer (who in the meantime had become editor of the journal *L'Esprit*). Cf. Maurice Nadeau, *History of Surrealism* (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 155, 161.
16. *Der Marxismus im Spiegel der französischen Philosophie*, cf. p. 176.
17. Max Scheler, "Die Sonderstellung des Menschen," in *Mensch und Erde* (Darmstadt: 1927), p. 246. On the materialist critique of the modern inclination to constitute something like a "unified portrayal of man,"

- see Max Horkheimer's seminal essay, "Bemerkungen zur philosophischen Anthropologie," in: *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, IV, Jg, Heft 1 (Paris: 1935), p. 1-25.
18. *Critique of Political Economy* (Berlin: 1951), p. 242.
 19. *German Ideology* (N.Y.: International Publishers, 1947), p. 15.
 20. *Ibid.*
 21. Quoted by Fetscher, *Der Marxismus im Spiegel der französischen Philosophie*, p. 189.
 22. On Lefèvre's critique of Jaspers, see *Rencontres internationales de Genève*, 1948 (Paris/Neufchâtel: 1949).
 23. In a book which is no longer completely acknowledged by its author, because of its all-to-self-consciously Marxist tenor, but which is nonetheless important: *L'existentialisme* (Paris: 1946).
 24. "Differenz des Fichteschen und des Schellingschen Systems der Philosophie," in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1, Glockner (Stuttgart: 1958) p. 44.
 25. *L'existentialisme*, p. 20.
 26. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
 27. See his studies, *Le nationalisme contre les nations* (Paris, 1937); *Hitler au pouvoir. Bilan de cinq années de fascisme en Allemagne* (Paris: 1938); *Nietzsche* (Paris, 1939), a book with a differentiated argument which denounces both the National Socialist's misuse of Nietzsche's philosophy and, equally, those motives in Nietzsche's thought which tend toward such a misuse.
 28. Nothing is more revelatory for the boundless dogmatism of the Stalinist era than Zhdanov's position in the 1947 philosophical discussion, in which he dismissed the "debate on Hegel" as a "rebirth of scholasticism" with the words: "The problem of Hegel has long been resolved. There is no occasion to take it up again" in *Über Kunst und Wissenschaft* (Berlin: 1951), p. 104.
 29. *La somme et le reste*, vol. 1, p. 87.
 30. *Ibid.*
 31. "Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie," in Marx/Engels, *Die heilige Familie* (Berlin: 1955), p. 11.
 32. Marx, "Kritik der Hegelschen Dialektik und Philosophie überhaupt," in *Ibid.*, p. 80.
 33. Even here a dialectic structure cannot be ascribed to it *en bloc*. See Alfred Schmidt, "Zum Verhältnis von Geschichte und Natur im dialektischen Materialismus," in *Existentialismus und Marxismus* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1965), pp. 103-155.
 34. Ernst Bloch may applaud Engels' recognition of the dialectic of nature, but the concept of nature and matter developed in *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* is not so much a refinement of Engels, but something much different: a mystical-teleological cosmology.

35. Sartre's astounding turning-point in *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris: 1960), owes extraordinarily much to Lefèvre. When Sartre grasps the categories of his "phenomenological ontology" concretely and historically, he explodes them. He is concerned with grounding "Marxist knowledge," in opposition to Hegel's absolute knowledge, in a "historical and structural anthropology" (cf. p. 108), for which "human existence" (now viewed through its strict economic determination) is inseparably linked with the "understanding of the human."
36. *The German Ideology*, p. 14.
37. Here he refers to Lenin, who in his 1894 polemic against the "populists" already stressed that historical materialism constitutes not only the pre-conditions of a critical economics, but also of sociology. Cf. *Werke*, vol. 1 (Berlin: 1963), pp. 129–131.
38. It is available in a highly advanced form in the studies of Adorno, Horkheimer and H. Marcuse, who have furthered critical and also psychoanalytical insights. They have attempted to satisfy the demands of a "dialectical anthropology" by making the society whole, in which everything individual is imprisoned, transparent even within the most private experience.
39. It is based on the concept of alienation developed by Lefèvre in the thirties and it is presented in the work *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (Paris: 1947). The second edition, of which two volumes have appeared so far (Paris: 1958 and 1962), is more important methodologically.
40. This had been preceded by a series of important publications, written in collaboration with N. Guterman.

Lefèvre published the first translation of the 1844 *Manuscripts* in the periodical *Avant-Poste* in 1933. In 1934, the introduction to the *Morceaux choisis de Karl Marx* contained the elements of a theory of consciousness that tried to go beyond the summary thesis that consciousness is a "reflex" of being. This theory was more closely argued, especially with reference to the situation of the Popular Front at that time, in the 1936 book, *La conscience mystifiée*. In the same year as *Dialectical Materialism*, there appeared the *Morceaux choisis de Hegel* and a text which had been completely unknown in France until then, *Cahiers de Lénine sur la dialectique de Hegel*. This last text had a long introduction in which Lefèvre—in opposition to orthodoxy—called attention to the objective meaning of Hegelian philosophy for Marxism and, in particular, attempted to show that a conception of Lenin centering on *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, of 1908, is unreliable. Both publications found almost no echo in the Party. In 1940, the *Cahiers* as well as *Dialectical Materialism* were placed on the *Otto* list of books forbidden and to be destroyed by the German occupation authority.

41. *Das Kapital*, vol. 1 (Berlin: 1955), p. 389.
42. In many respects he sees the problem "Marxism and philosophy" differently today. Although in the thirties he had already disputed the view that dialectical materialism was a philosophy in the traditional sense,

that is, a metaphysical system, he still held firm to the view that it is still a *philosophy*: one which is free from the limits of previous philosophies. The Marxist idea of the "Aufhebung" of philosophy did not seem to offer any special problem. In view of the fact that the "revolutionizing *praxis*" into which philosophy was supposed to be dissolved, never occurred, Lefèvre today sees himself forced to pose anew the question of the meaning of philosophy. In the apparent failure of Stalinized Marxism, he thus no longer sees merely a deviation from authentic "Marxist philosophy." That concept itself has in the meantime become suspect to him. The crisis of Marxism is symptomatic of a crisis of philosophy in general. It should be reflected on by means of a "meta-philosophy." Beginnings of it are found in *La somme et le reste*, vol. 1, pp. 48 and 68; especially in parts VI and VII of the second volume, "What Is the philosopher?" and "Is There a philosophy?" cf. pp. 659-761. Cf. also the larger book which has appeared in the meantime, *Méta-philosophie* (Paris: 1965).

43. Ralf Dahrendorf, *Marx in Perspektiv* (Hannover: 1952), p. 165.
44. Since published in a single volume by Dietz, Berlin, 1953. [Known better in English as the "*Grundrisse*"—Ed.]
45. Caught as he was in the then obligatory, yet objectively senseless, division of Marxism into historical and dialectical materialism, Lefèvre sees the origins of the latter only at this point. The general development of Marx and Engels up to *Poverty of Philosophy* (1847) is supposed to be one toward "historical materialism" and to consist in a principled rejection of the Hegelian dialectic. A thesis which Lefèvre's book, however much its structure was determined by it, refutes.
46. Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, p. 76.
47. *The German Ideology*, p. 24.
48. Cf. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 9ff.
49. *Phenomenology of Mind*, tr. Baillie, p. 548.
50. *WW*, vol. 16 (Leipzig: 1922), Aph. 523.
51. Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. 1, p. 8.
52. A procedure he uses not only in *Dialectical Materialism*, but also in the two important books *Pour connaître la pensée de Karl Marx* (Paris: 1948), and *Pour connaître la pensée de Lénine* (Paris: 1957).
53. Marx to Lassalle, Letter of November 12, 1858, in Marx/Engels, *Werke*, Vol. 29 (Berlin: 1963), p. 567.
54. Marx to Lassalle, Letter of February 22, 1858, in *ibid.*, p. 550.

The “Scientific Dialectics” of Galvano Della Volpe

Mario Montano

Until the mid-1960s the name of Galvano Della Volpe was rarely mentioned in the theoretical debates of the international Left. Then, in 1965, Erich Fromm's “international symposium” on *Socialist Humanism*¹ (featuring works by Goldman, Senghor, Marcuse, Petrović, and Dolci among others) published Della Volpe's essay, “The Legal Philosophy of Socialism.” This, along with *Per la Teoria di un Umanismo Positivo* (1949), seemed to place him in a well-known context: the Italian counterpart of the Yugoslav *Praxis* group and of Fromm's own “school.” Since then, however, the image of these Italian “humanists” has been questioned. As the names of Della Volpe and Colletti began to appear occasionally in *New Left Review*, it became known that their theory placed an unique emphasis on “science.” Louis Althusser himself expressed his respect for Della Volpe's “scholarly, rigorous and deep”² works. A new label, “neo-positivist Marxism,” was coined to describe the work of a group of writers which included Della Volpe, Colletti, and Althusser. A vague image of supposed similarities between the Italian and the French political situations reinforced this idea.

More recently other factors have aroused curiosity about Della Volpe. The stagnation of the student movement and a wave of

wildcat strikes reaching back to 1967 have led the New Left to rediscover Marxism, and with it (though to a much lesser degree), the existence of the working class. In 1968, the French General Strike forced "the movement" into the awareness of its own political and intellectual isolation. This feeling was reinforced by Italy's "creeping" May, a long period of labor unrest culminating in a massive strike at the multinational giant, Fiat. And "labor news" from Italy has continued to dominate the headlines. It is only natural that this new political climate should arouse interest in present-day French and Italian Marxism. It would not be surprising if the recent translations of Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci are soon followed by translations of the work of Della Volpe and Colletti. It may well be the destiny of philosophy that its political impact always arrives *post festum*.

Galvano Della Volpe died in 1968. His philosophical reflection has little connection with the present political wave. His major works belong to the forties and fifties. His interest in Marx dates back to 1943. Before this date, he wrote on a wide range of topics: Italian idealism, David Hume, Hegel, and Romantic aesthetics, to mention a few. His conversion to Marxism brought him into the ranks of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). His political membership demonstrates the same quiet detachment as his academic affiliation.³ To the Party he was "a scholar"; to the university, a "Communist." While he did not become the PCI's *philosophical* spokesman, his *political* outlook was substantially in agreement with the "official line." His works were well known among the young Party intellectuals; and, in the early sixties, when a new political ferment pushed many intellectuals outside the PCI toward a "New Left," they brought along Della Volpe's main works. His rigorous thought seemed to provide an antidote to the unprincipled ideology of a Party that was moving in a social-democratic direction. Thus, Della Volpe's relationship to the present radical Left is at best indirect. The new forms of working-class organization and the political content of its struggles cannot be learned from him. What Della Volpe does offer us can be fully understood only in the context of the Marxist theoretical debate which took place between the two wars. Its historical setting shows its own theoretical relevance to the present.

From the twenties until the Cold War two schools dominated the Marxist scene: the "dialectical materialism" of the Stalinist

interpreters and of their European and American "official" counterparts, and the so-called "Western Marxism," a very general label which covered, to mention a few, Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy*, Sartre's own "Marxist" phase and the French followers and exegetes of Lukács' philosophical reflection.⁴ However great their political differences (particularly with regard to their divergent attitudes toward the Stalinist model and toward "bourgeois culture"), and however different their respective "fields of interest"—for the "Russians," the establishment of a system of universal "dialectical laws"; for the "westerners," an antiscientist and antipositivistic discussion of the problem of man's alienation—a clean delineation is made somewhat difficult by the fact that, theoretically, they share an important philosophical source and ground: a common Hegelian matrix.

If the universal dialectical laws of "dialectical materialism" are the mere transcription of the triadic structures found in Hegel's *Logic*, Lukács' concept of "reification" and Korsch's re-proposal of the category of "totality" are the conscious resumption of Hegel's "totality" and "alienation."⁵ Both Marxisms assume a continuity between Hegel and Marx, as detected in the "dialectic." The historical precedent for such an interpretation probably lies in the distinction, proposed in Engels' *Ludwig Feuerbach* (1886), between Hegel's conservative *system* and his *dialectical method*. For Engels the system must be rejected, but the method has to be saved. That is, Marx seems simply to have inherited ready-made Hegel's dialectical method, stripped of its reactionary results (the "system").

Della Volpe radically disagrees with this supposed smooth continuity. To do so, he has to show that in Hegel such a separation is not possible. More important, he must find such proof in Marx himself, both the "young Marx" and the "mature," in the form of the immediate connection between Hegel's dialectical method and his conservative philosophical results. But before entering this discussion, the political implications of Della Volpe's reflections must be made clear.

Caught between its Soviet and Western alternatives, Marxism had lost touch with one of the most crucial aspects of the historical-materialist perspective: the critical and scientific analysis of the concrete process of social production, i.e., the study of the historical development of capitalism and its social classes. What

the Marxism of the "dialecticians" seemed to have lost was nothing less than the real working class as a concrete, dynamic, and "empirical" entity. To be sure, as a *philosophical* category and an *ideological* reference, the "working class" had been quite alive both in Western and in Soviet Marxism. It had, for example, appeared as the "subject-object" of Lukács and as the empirical carrier of all general laws of "dialectical materialism" (when "applied" to society). But its concrete internal structure, the real forms of its world-wide development, and the historical models of its own self-activity, had been gradually shifting out of the Marxists' theoretical focus.

That the dialectical formalism of the Russians should have prevented a concrete critical analysis of the Soviet mode of production from the point of view of the workers is not surprising considering that the golden years of "dialectical materialism" were also the years of Stalin's "industrialization" (that is, the systematic extraction of surplus-value from the Soviet workers by their Communist leaders). "Western Marxism," however, was no more successful in reviving Marx's tools of concrete social analysis, for in its attempt to restore Marx's theory it chose to focus solely on his "method"—that is, the "dialectic." As a result, the critical and scientific potential of historical materialism vanished into dialectical and methodological speculation.

Della Volpe's historical contribution to the development of this century's theoretical Marxism has been to propose an interpretation of historical materialism that would again turn it into a crucial cognitive tool capable of true class analysis and prediction. Though fully conscious of the theoretical importance of his interpretative work, Della Volpe did not choose the path of open political opposition to the two dominant schools. Reasons of sheer political expediency may have determined the "shaded" mood of his cautious philosophical disagreements, for "dialectical materialism" was still the dominant ideology of the PCI. It is also possible that Della Volpe himself was not fully aware of all the political implications of his reading of Marx. In any case, it is certainly a fact that, as I have shown elsewhere,⁶ in his more political works Della Volpe's fundamental theoretical disagreement turns into an outright defense of the official line.

Della Volpe's philosophical works, have helped educate a whole new generation of Marxists, rediscovering historical materialism as a tool of concrete research. Such a rediscovery would

have hardly been possible without Della Volpe’s peculiar style: Della Volpe *reads* Marx. Soviet Marxists, on the one hand, had a legacy to revive and a justifying *Weltanschauung* to construct. For them the easy formulas of “dialectical materialism” (the “negation of the negation,” the turning of quantity into quality, and the like) had an advantage over Marx’s own thought: they could be applied to all conceivable situations, thus proving the “philosophical” superiority of the Party’s viewpoint. “Western” Marxists, on the other hand, had often to mediate between their own philosophical past and the left-wing political concerns which came out of a new quest for “relevance.” Neither needed Marx, really.

In an international milieu characterized by all kinds of revisions, reassessments, and partial restorations of Marx’s thought, Della Volpe chose for himself a role of modesty: he would simply be a *reader*. This was itself a big job, which could not be performed through official “portraits” of Marx. This explains Della Volpe’s “philological” emphasis, his painstakingly rigorous style, patient theoretical mood, and the unique quality of his work, which substitutes for easy modish brilliance the thoughtful intelligence of the loving interpreter. Finally, it explains the problems we face as readers; to read Della Volpe means, immediately, to read Marx.⁷

Della Volpe has two main points of departure: (1) the cognitive failure of Hegel’s dialectic, as proven by Marx, and of mystified “speculative dialectic” in general, as the idealist philosophical method which dissolves historical reality into pure thought; and (2) the cognitive success of Marx’s own method, “scientific dialectic,” as proven by his critique of political economy, and the success of the scientific experimental method in general, both in the natural sciences (since Galileo) and in the social sciences (since Marx). According to Della Volpe, Marx has given us all the elements for a critical identification of the essence of the idealist speculative dialectic, in terms of its logical mechanism, its mode of abstraction, its concepts, and its philosophical assumptions. In addition, Marx can provide us with a *new* discourse on method which makes us aware of the reasons for the deep cognitive wealth of historical materialism and of the experimental method in general. From this we will be able to draw rules for the future.

Since historically as well as theoretically Marx’s method devel-

oped in a constant dialogue with and in opposition to Hegel's philosophy, Della Volpe's critique of idealism and his interpretation of Marxism as science must take the form of an historico-philological reconstruction of Marx's methodological works. Before following the process of this reconstruction, let us consider its main steps.

"Hypostasization" or "substantification" of thought is, for Della Volpe, the fundamental logical mechanism of idealism's dialectic. First, speculation reduces reality to an idea; then, it takes this idea as reality itself—that is, *substantifies* it. Thus hypostasization implies an inversion of reality and idea, of matter and mind, of subject and predicate, or, in Hegel's terminology, of finite and infinite. The essence of this inversion according to Della Volpe is outlined in Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the State* (1843) and in the well-known *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.⁸ The reduction of reality to ideas is the necessary premise for hypostasization and is made possible by a particular mode of abstraction, *indeterminate* or generic *abstraction*, which disposes of, or abstracts from, all determinate, specific, concrete traits and focuses on indeterminate, generic, abstract features alone. It involves the disposal of all essential differences in the name of the General and Common, or in the name of the Idea. Against idealism's generic, indeterminate abstraction, Della Volpe proposes a specific or *determinate abstraction*. The concepts and categories used in *Capital*—"abstract labor," "capitalist production," and the like—are examples of determinate abstractions, for they refer to a specific, finite, determinate mode of production.⁹ In other words, a determinate abstraction is essentially *historical*, and so is the process of scientific production itself, which arises from history and must be *verified* in history. All scientific production, therefore, must follow the experimental method and develop out of hypotheses and verifications. This is the method of the "scientific dialectic" of which Marx speaks explicitly with regard to the *Poverty of Philosophy* and which he discusses more fully in the 1857 Introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859).

Let us now take up Della Volpe's historical reconstruction, beginning with the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the State*.¹⁰ Marx's commentary on paragraphs 261–269 of Hegel's *Philosophy of the State*, concerning the deduction of the transition from the

family and civil society to the state, is in Della Volpe’s consideration crucial. Marx says:

Family and civil society are grasped [by Hegel] as *conceptual spheres* of the state. . . . It is the state which *divides* itself into them . . . and *does* this “in order to leave behind its ideality and to become *explicitly infinite* actual Spirit.” . . . Here, the logical, pantheistic mysticism is strikingly apparent . . . the Idea is thoroughly subjectivized [“substantified,” Della Volpe comments, “or hypostasized.”¹¹] . . . Family and civil society are the presuppositions of the state; they are really the active forms. But in speculation this is reversed. As the Idea is subjectivized, the actual subjects—civil society, family, etc.—become . . . objective moments of the Idea.¹²

The real, actual determinations “are left just as they are, but at the same time acquire the meaning of a determination of the Idea, a result, a product of the Idea.” What is the First, the *real* subject, civil society, family and the like, becomes a Second, a predicate, while the real predicate, the State, or the Idea, appears as a *logical* First. When the Idea, the predicate, is substantified, reality, or the real subject, appears as a product. Reality becomes a result of the Idea: “Hegel’s assertions simply mean: Family and civil society are parts of the state . . . Citizens of the state are members of families and members of civil society.” In *reality*, therefore, “family and civil society are actual parts of the state . . . they are the state’s particular mode of existence. Family and civil society themselves *comprise* the state.” In Hegel’s *speculation*, however,

they are *produced* by the actual Idea [as the state]. It is not their own life that binds them into the state; rather, it is the life of the Idea that has discerned them from itself; . . . they owe their particular existence to a spirit different from their own; they are determinations made by a third party, not self-determinations.¹³

This point is crucial. Here, “the entire mystery of Hegel’s philosophy of law and of his philosophy in general is laid out.”¹⁴ For Hegel, all that matters is “finding for the particular concrete definitions the corresponding abstract ones.”¹⁵ The reversal of subject and predicate implies a reversal of reality and thought: “Hegel does not develop his thinking from the object, but he develops the object by . . . [his] thinking.”¹⁶

Della Volpe finds two main contributions here. First, the understanding that, if the method of speculative dialectic consists in the idealist reversal of subject and predicate, of reality and idea, the actual result of this method is no “empty” concept (as in Feuerbach’s criticism of Hegel). On the contrary, it results in a “*vicious fullness of empirical contents* which remain unmediated or *undigested* precisely because they are merely *transcended by generic* (i.e., preconceived, *a priori*) abstractions.”¹⁷ Hegel, as we have just seen, leaves the real determinations “as they are” but, at the same time, he makes them appear as determinations of the Idea, or manifestations of the Spirit itself. The conservative nature of this process should be apparent. Take Marx’s comment on Hegel’s paragraph 279. On the left side of the page Marx writes the *real*, empirical statement; on the right side, he has Hegel’s *speculative* reversal.

The Common Man

The monarch possesses sovereign power, sovereignty. Sovereignty does what it wants to do.

Hegel

The *sovereignty* of the state is *the monarch*. Sovereignty is “the abstract and hence ungrounded *self-determination* of the will, containing the ultimate basis of decision.”

Hegel converts every attribute of the constitutional monarch in present-day Europe into absolute self-determinations of the *will*. He does not say: the monarch’s will is the ultimate decision; but he says: the will’s ultimate decision is—the monarch. The first assertion is empirical. The second twists empirical fact into a metaphysical axiom.¹⁸

Through this reversal, empirical, “undigested” reality becomes sanctified.

Concrete, material reality, which was disposed of by Hegel’s idealist, indeterminate abstractions, comes to life again in the “empirical” content of his “pure” speculation. Hence, concludes Della Volpe, from the “sterility and vicious fullness of any reasoning which does not take matter, as the extra-rational, into proper account,” one has to “infer the positivity and essentiality of matter as a gnoseological element.”¹⁹ A first positive methodological guideline has thus been found.

The second important contribution of the *Critique* is seen

in the new method that Marx proposes in opposition to Hegel’s speculation:

The true philosophical critique of the modern constitution of the state does not point out the contradictions as subsistant; it *explains* them, it comprehends their genesis, their necessity. It takes them in their *specific* signification. This comprehension, however, does not consist, as Hegel implies, in again recognizing everywhere the determinations of the logical concept, but in taking up the specific logic of the specific object.²⁰

A *specific*, determinate method is thus set up against idealism’s *generic* and undeterminate abstractions.

Della Volpe finds further specifications of both methods in the *1844 Manuscripts*. The reversal of subject and predicate is again fully exposed.

In Hegel real man and real nature become mere predicates—symbols of this esoteric unreal man and of this unreal nature. Subject and predicate are therefore related to each other in absolute reversals—a *mystical subject-object* or a *subjectivity reaching beyond the object*.²¹

That “vicious fullness” of empirical content which derives from the fact that Hegel’s speculation “leaves things as they are” is now perspicuously understood as “uncritical positivism” (the “philosophic dissolution and restoration of the existing empirical world”).²² Finally, a rough suggestion is laid down that opens the possibility of understanding Marx’s own method in terms of its unity with the method of natural science.

History itself is a *real* part of *natural history*—of nature developing into man. Natural science will in time incorporate into itself the science of man, just as the science of man will incorporate into itself natural science: there will be *one* science.²³

Turning to the *Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx’s ruthless attack on Proudhon’s *Philosophy of Poverty*, Della Volpe provides a sharper clarification of the conservative political meaning of speculative dialectic. The inversion of subject and predicate, between things and ideas, is neither an innocent scholastic game, nor merely a logical “mistake.” When one transcends all concrete and real givens and makes them so many abstractions and logical

categories, all real transient historical determinations are bound to appear as rational, eternal, and natural. Speculation's political vocation is thereby realized. We live in the best of all possible worlds and biology is destiny. "Economists," says Marx, "explain how production takes place in . . . [given] relations, but what they do not explain is how these relations themselves are produced, that is, the historical movement which gave them birth."²⁴ If:

. . . the economist's material is the active, energetic life of man, M. Proudhon's material is the dogmas of the economists. But the moment we cease to pursue the historical movement of production relations, of which the categories are but the theoretical expression, the moment we want to see in these categories no more than ideas, spontaneous thoughts, independent of real relations, we are forced to attribute the origin of these thoughts to the movement of pure reason. . . . Is it surprising that everything, in the final abstraction—for we have here an abstraction ["indeterminate abstraction", comments Della Volpe²⁵] and not an analysis—presents itself as a logical category?²⁶

But how does such "abstraction" move? Just as "we have transformed everything into a logical category, so one has only to make an abstraction of every distinctive ["determinate," adds Della Volpe²⁷] characteristic of different movements to attain movement in its abstract condition—purely formal movement, the purely logical form of the movement." Thus:

. . . all things being reduced to a logical category, and every movement, every act of production, to method, it follows naturally that every aggregate of products and production, of objects and of movement, can be reduced to a form of applied metaphysics. What Hegel has done for religion, law, etc., M. Proudhon seeks to do for political economy.²⁸

And here is the conservative political result: Proudhon, says Marx, "understands very well that men make cloth, linen or silk materials in definite relations of production. But what he has not understood is that these definite social relations are just as much produced by men as linen, flax, etc."²⁹ Furthermore:

The same men who establish their social relations in conformity with their material productivity, produce also principles, ideas, and categories,

in conformity with their social relations. Thus these ideas, these categories are as little eternal as the relations they express. They are *historical and transitory products*.³⁰ [But] . . . when the economists say that present-day relations—the relations of bourgeois production—are natural, they imply that these are the relations in which wealth is created and productive forces developed in conformity with the laws of nature. These relations therefore are themselves natural laws independent of the influence of time. They are eternal laws which must always govern society. Thus there has been a history, but there is no longer any.³¹

Della Volpe finds the conclusion to all this in a letter to Schweitzer (1/24/1865). In the *Philosophy of Poverty*, says Marx, Proudhon proved "how little he has penetrated into the secret of scientific dialectics and how, on the contrary, he shares the illusions of speculative philosophy in his treatment of the *economic categories*; how instead of conceiving them as the *theoretical expression of historical relations of production*, corresponding to a particular stage of development in material production, he transforms them by his twaddle into pre-existing *eternal ideas*, and in this roundabout way arrives once more at the standpoint of bourgeois economy."³² The antithesis between speculative and scientific dialectic could not be any sharper. The anti-speculative, materialist method, which in 1843 Marx defined as a "truly philosophical critique," has now become a "scientific dialectic." However, scientific dialectic, he now says, has a *mystery* in itself.

According to Della Volpe, the mystery of scientific dialectic is unfolded in the 1857 Introduction to *A Critique of Political Economy*, the crucial text of the entire reconstruction. In this Introduction the characterization of the speculative method is articulated fully with respect to the abstractions of political economy. At this level, "speculative dialectic" is more than that of Hegel, Proudhon, and the "modern economists"; it is the method of *ideology* in general. Furthermore, for Della Volpe the Introduction also clearly defines the "correct method" itself as essentially historical and experimental. As such, "scientific dialectic" transcends Marx's own work, and is acknowledged as the experimental method of *science* at large.

"*Production in general*," says Marx, "is an abstraction, but it is a rational abstraction, insofar as it singles out and fixes the common features thereby saving us repetition."³³ In other words, it is a "generic abstraction," for it takes *only* the *common* traits of *all* real, historical, specific modes of production.

Yet these general or common features discovered by comparison constitute something very complex, whose constituent elements have different destinations. Some of these elements belong to all epochs, others are common only to a few. Some of them are common to the most modern as well as the most ancient epochs. No production is conceivable without them; but while even the most completely developed languages have laws and conditions in common with the least developed ones, what is characteristic of their development are the points of departure from the general and common. The conditions that generally govern production [therefore] must be differentiated in order that the essential points of difference not be lost sight of in view of the general uniformity which is due to the fact that the subject, mankind, and the object, nature, remain the same.³⁴

In other words, if the essential points of difference are not taken into account, any *real*, concrete mode of production vanishes in the *ideal* abstraction of production in general. Here, says Marx, lies the "wisdom of modern economists who are trying to prove the eternal nature and harmony of existing social conditions." No production is possible without means of production and stored-up labor. Capital is both a means of production and stored-up labor. No production is possible without capital. "Hence capital," states Marx ironically, "is a universal, eternal, and natural phenomenon; which is true, if we *disregard* the *specific* properties which turn an 'instrument of production' and 'stored-up labor' into capital."³⁵ First, modern economists take capitalist production as production *tout court*; then they proceed to "prove" that it is irreplaceable. First, reality becomes an idea, then, the idea is taken as real. The process of hypostasization is complete. No production is possible without appropriation. Private property is appropriation. "Therefore" no production is possible without private property. The sanctification of existing conditions assumes the mask of sheer common sense.³⁶

If these are the results of *speculation*, what would the method of *science* be like? How can we avoid generic abstractions? For Della Volpe, the answer lies in Chapter 3 of this Introduction.

It is . . . necessary to follow a "scientifically correct" method: i.e., first of all *to move toward abstractions* (without which no thought or knowledge is possible) *starting from the "concrete,"* from the "concrete subject," which is in this case an historically "given society." . . . If, in order to explain the whole social process of production, we start from

the population as its basis, without taking into account “classes,” and the concrete historical elements which constitute them (such as wage-labor, capital, etc.) . . . , in so doing we proceed from an “imaginary” concrete toward less and *less complex abstractions*. . . . And this is the method of bourgeois political economy. . . . But, Marx continues, if once we have reached the simplest abstractions . . . we “start on our return journey” until we “finally come back to population as a rich aggregate of many conceptions and relations” . . . in so doing we follow the *correct method*, for which “the abstract definitions lead to the reproduction of the concrete in the movement of thought.”

“Thus,” Della Volpe concludes, “the correct method can be represented as a *circular* movement from the concrete or real to the abstract or ideal and from the latter back to the former. This means precisely a continuous, unavoidable *historical verification* of economic *abstractions* or categories.”³⁷ These verified categories and abstractions will be specific, determinate concepts. Scientific dialectic, therefore, is but the experimental method itself, always starting from a real, concrete problem, proceeding to a rational (and in this sense “abstract”) hypothesis, and finally coming back to concreteness for the verification.

It is at this point, Della Volpe feels, that the remarks on the unity of natural and social sciences (“there will be *one* science”) in the *1844 Manuscripts* make sense. For “there is but *one* science” and “there is but *one* method, i.e., *one* logic: the materialist logic of modern, experimental science. . . . The *techniques* which constitute the physical, the economic, and the social law are certainly as different as the respective experiences and realities are. . . . But the *method* is one, whose symbol will be the concrete-abstract-concrete circle.”³⁸

In social science, this method of verification means, for Della Volpe, an “historical experimental restatement of categories,”³⁹ or a verification of sociological and economic concepts in terms of real, concrete, and specific modes of production. What is implied in the “experimental restatement” is first that, as Marx writes, we cannot take economic categories simply, “in the order in which they were the determining factors in the course of history.”⁴⁰ Their order of sequence “is rather determined by the relation which they bear to one another in modern bourgeois society and which is the exact opposite of what seems to be their natural order, or the order of their historical development.”⁴¹

For instance, “nothing seems more natural than to start from the rent, with landed property, since it is bound up with land, the source of all production and exchange, and with the first form of production . . . , i.e., agriculture.”⁴² Capital itself, “with the exception of purely monetary capital, has . . . the characteristic of land-ownership in the middle ages.” But “the reverse is true of bourgeois society,” where “agriculture comes to be more and more a branch of industry and is completely dominated by capital. . . . The same is true of rent . . . Rent cannot be understood without capital, while capital can be understood without rent.”⁴³ Capital, therefore, and not rent, “must form the starting point as well as the end, and must be developed before land-ownership is.”⁴⁴

For Della Volpe, this is an example of the experimental method at work, as the movement from concrete to abstract to concrete. We *start* from capital and we *end* with capital, as the present and the concrete. The present from which we start, says Della Volpe, is itself “the *result* of an historical process.” Our search for causes, therefore, “must become a search for historical antecedents.”⁴⁵ Not every chronological precedent, however, can count as a cause for the present, only that precedent which is not “accidental,” but “logical” can be taken as a cause.⁴⁶ We begin with the concrete and move to its logical antecedents, the abstract. What is implied in this process is a “*choice* of those precedents which are logical *and* historical antecedents of our present.” In this way, the present “utilizes and develops” these antecedents and makes them into “concepts and criteria which are meant to solve its specific, new problems.”⁴⁷ We have thus returned to the level of the concrete. Such concepts and criteria, in fact, count as “*experimental criteria*,” or “*models for actions and events*.”⁴⁸

This point is crucial, for it represents Della Volpe’s way of unifying politics and science. Not only does the experimental structure of Marx’s dialectic hold for both natural and social sciences, but for revolutionary social practice as well. “Human social *practice* [must] cooperate with the *theoretical* objectivity of our hypotheses.”⁴⁹ In this way, our practice will count as “historical *experiment*” proper, and the relationship between reason and matter will now be seen as “mutual functionality of *ideology* and *action*.” For “it is in *practice*, or in action, that *theory*, as truth, must be *confirmed* and *affirmed*.” Thus the “specific logic of the specific object” outlined by Marx in the 1843 *Critique*, “can

only mean the *experimental logic*, i.e., the *law*, which represents the solution to philosophical or ‘ethical’ problems as much as to ‘physical’ problems.⁵⁰ The very “demonstration of the necessity of the transition and historical development” from capitalism to socialism “relies on the cognitive and gnoseological instrument which is the dialectical analysis.”⁵¹ The internal contradiction of capitalism, as the contradiction between the social character of labor and the private character of capital, prefigures the *hypothesis* of socialism as the necessary solution. Beyond Marx’s commitment to revolution, Della Volpe sees the working of the experimental method itself. It is from such a specific, experimental viewpoint that he agrees with Garaudy: “From a Marxist perspective, the scientist and the moralist coincide.”⁵²

As we have seen, the methodological unity of social and natural science is the essential feature of Della Volpe’s reflection. According to him, the logic and methodology that characterize both Marx’s work and the work of the physicist constitute the modern critical synthesis of the two classical philosophical approaches to knowledge: induction, analysis, and matter, on the one hand; deduction, synthesis, and reason, on the other. Different logical principles are involved in the two approaches. Induction implies the principle of noncontradiction ($A=A$, $B=B$, $A\neq B$); deduction implies the critique of this principle, and its substitution with its negation ($A=B$). The inductive-analytical statement is exclusive: *either* this *or* that; while the deductive-synthetic statement is inclusive: *both* this *and* that (or “tauto-etherology”).⁵³ Fundamentally, for Della Volpe, induction implies the recognition of matter, as that which is outside reason, while deduction implies the negation of matter and the reduction of matter (as the finite) to thought (as the infinite).

Della Volpe finds in Marx a systematic critique of the deductive, idealist, speculative approach in the science of man. As far as the science of nature is concerned, Galileo’s criticism of deductive, peripatetic physics is seen as the precise counterpart of Marx’s anti-idealist critique. Like Hegel, scholastic physics disregards reality, or immediately reduces it to the idea. In Galileo’s *Dialogo dei Massimi Sistemi* Sagredo says to Simplicio: “You, together with Aristotle, start out by turning me away from the tangible world, and point out to me the architecture with which it ought to be built.”⁵⁴ Thus, the objects of scholastic physics, as much as those of idealist philosophy, are not facts, but ideas. Hegel’s cognitive failure is that of Simplicio: both end

up where they had started.⁵⁵ In both cases, the negation of matter is crucial. It is from the sterility of all idealist approaches, that Della Volpe infers, as we have seen, “the positivity and essentiality of matter as a gnoseological element.”⁵⁶ Materialism, therefore, constitutes the necessary basis for formulating the scientific experiment. No hypothesis can be proven without verification; no deduction can be cognitively successful if it does not meet with induction; a reason which does not test itself against matter will condemn itself to failure. The experimental method, therefore, needs a true theory of matter.

Materialism, however, does not mean sheer induction. Scientific methodology contains a critique of empiricism as well. If pure synthesis, or reason alone, cannot give us the truth, analysis without synthesis, and matter without reason also remain empty. They do not acquire *meaning*. Against scholastic physics and Hegelian philosophy, Galileo and Marx do not propose sheer induction. The facts do not speak for themselves. Questions have to be asked. A verification must have something to verify. Deduction and induction, synthesis and analysis must be mutually functional. “Against Bacon’s purely *inductive* science, and against empiricist and positivistic science at large, which remains suspicious of all hypotheses, regarded as ‘premature anticipations’ of nature, . . . Galileo makes use of an *induction*” which does not consist in a mere search for “empirical constants” (or generic abstractions), but starts from that particular type of experience which is the *experiment*, “insofar as it is always the experiment of an *hypothesis-idea*.”⁵⁷ And at the same time, “against scholastic purely *deductive* science . . . , Galileo makes use of a *deduction* . . . which finds the *proof* of the truth of its hypothesis . . . not just in itself . . . but in the *experiment*.”⁵⁸ Next to a true theory of matter, therefore, scientific dialectic needs a true theory of reason.

A true theory of reason is precisely what Marx owes to Hegel. This original point of Della Volpe’s has been elaborated upon by Lucio Colletti. “The famous ‘rational kernel’ of Hegel’s dialectic is precisely his theory of reason. . . . The greatness of this theory becomes apparent if one realizes that only Hegel has been able to develop coherently the idea that thought is *not* an object, that reason is not a positive, or a thing. In all previous philosophies, in fact, the infinite has always been conceived as separate from the finite.”⁵⁹ Thought has always been held as separate from reality. Infinitude, or thought, lay at one side opposed to finitude,

as reality, on the other. But if the infinite is taken as only *one* of the two, it becomes reduced to a finite. "The only way, therefore, to conceive coherently the infinite or thought, the only way to think the negative in an adequate manner, lies in understanding that the negative is negative precisely because it is not 'one of the two,' it is not 'this' in opposition to 'that.' It is 'both this and that,' or comprehension of the whole opposition." It follows that "the only way to conceive of the infinite coherently and without contradiction . . . lies in conceiving of it as dialectic and contradiction."⁶⁰

Reason as negative—and reason as dialectic: this is Marx's starting point. *Reason as negative* means that reason cannot be separated from matter, and cannot stand by itself. Marx's "reversal of idealist dialectic, or his 'introduction of materialism in gnoseology,' consists of the fact that, having understood [with Hegel] that reason is a negative and that it therefore cannot be by itself as a substratum and a subject, he takes it as a *function*, or predicate, of positive."⁶¹ Ideas are not things, but functions of things. Thought is not an object, but a function of the real object. Deduction cannot be a separate process; it must be a function of experience.

Reason as dialectic points to the experimental method as well. For example, "it is impossible to understand *abstract labor*, its difference from all other labors, if one does not compare it with (and therefore relate it to) useful or *concrete labor*."⁶² And it is reason alone that can take both labors together. However, this operation of relating, or including, and this understanding of what is common to two labors are in themselves a *function* of a different operation. I relate abstract labor to concrete labor (the productive labor of capitalist society to that of all previous societies), or I include concrete labor in my understanding of abstract labor, precisely because I need "to know what I must *exclude*, or put aside as inessential when I come to define the productive labor of capitalist society [abstract labor]."⁶³ "What is general and common to all objects or real beings," in other words, "is not in itself an object or a being: it is only an idea."⁶⁴ Production "in general" is no real production; property *tout court* is no concrete historical form of property. Here lies Hegel's fundamental mistake. He takes the "rational totality as the true concrete."⁶⁵ For Della Volpe and Colletti the trouble with Hegel is not to be found in the often presumed contradiction between a "good" method and

a “bad” system, as in a poor application of an otherwise correct methodology. Hegel’s mistake, the unresolved contradiction, is that “he rightly conceived of thought as negativity and relation, while at the same time kept the fundamental idealistic assumption: he shared the religious, Christian thesis that the finite, the world, all real things, do not exist by themselves but are something created, secondary and dependent.”⁶⁶ In other words, Hegel held a true theory of reason with a false premise—idealism. It is because of this contradiction that, in the development of a new methodology, we have encountered Hegel two times, first Hegel the idealist, then Hegel the theoretician of reason.

If both matter and reason have to meet in the dialectical process, so do their respective logical principles. Insofar as thought, as relation and inclusion, is involved in the formulation of the hypothesis, the logical *principle of tauto-etherology*, as the unity of opposites (“both this and that”), is also involved. Insofar as reality, as division and exclusion (“either this or that”), is needed to set up the experiment, the *principle of identity* is needed as well. Therefore, the logic of Marxism and the logic of Galileo, in a word, the modern logic of science, has to acknowledge as its basis a new logical principle, the principle of *tauto-etherological identity*, as a relationship of unity and distinction. Identity, or distinction, on the one hand, because thought is a *specific function* of reality and “ideas” are not immediately “things.” Tauto-etherology, or unity, on the other, because thought, as a function, is part of reality as a whole, and “ideas” are functions of “things.” The Marxist theory of dialectic is “at once, a theory of both the unity and the exclusion of opposites. It is a theory that tries to guarantee at the same time both the moment of *knowledge* . . . and that of *reality*” itself.⁶⁷ From this point of view, materialist dialectic and scientific experiment fully and completely coincide. Sociology can again be a materialist science.⁶⁸

Notes

1. Erich Fromm, ed., *Socialist Humanism* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1965).
2. Louis Althusser, *Legger: il Capitale* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1968), p. 83.
3. Della Volpe taught for decades in the provincial University of Messina, Sicily.

4. For a recent exposition of the history of the relationship between Lukács and the official "Marxist-Leninist" line, see Paul Breines, "Introduction to Lukács 'The Old Culture and the New,'" *Telos*, 5 (Spring 1970), pp. 1-20.
5. The existence of a common Hegelian matrix in the two schools is shown in Lucio Colletti, *Il Marxismo e Hegel* (Bari: Laterza, 1969), *passim*. For him the derivation of dialectical materialism from Hegel contains a fundamental philosophical oversight.

The sense and the function of the "dialectic of matter" in Hegel's thought is, in Hegel's own words, the following: "The dialectic of matter constitutes an essential moment of every religious consciousness." The sense that the "dialectic of matter" comes to assume in Engels and in Lenin is, as it is well-known, quite another: to them, it constitutes the most mature and the highest form of *materialism*. At this point one could hypothesize that the same name ["dialectic of matter"] may be concealing two different philosophical conceptions. This hypothesis, however, must be rejected. . . . All fundamental statements of the "dialectic of matter" have been originally formulated by Hegel . . . ; dialectical materialism has simply transcribed them into its texts. But since, in this transcription, the authors of dialectical materialism have clearly shown that they believe that those statements imply, *already in Hegel's own text*, a materialistic assumption, we have to conclude quite simply that they have made a mistake. This mistake, however, has represented the basis of about a century of theoretical marxism. [*Ibid.*, pp. 190-191.]

6. Cf. my "On the Methodology of Determinate Abstraction: Essay on Galvano Della Volpe," *Telos*, 7 (Spring 1971): 30-49.
7. As the reader will see, this is *literally* true. Since Della Volpe considers himself an interpreter, a good deal of his works take the form of a commentary on Marx's own writings and are crammed with long pages of quotations. One of his merits is that he called our attention to Marxian texts which have generally been overlooked (particularly the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the State* and the 1857 Introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*). In an attempt to convey this "philological" message, my exposition will follow Della Volpe's guidelines: I will quote Marx at great length.
8. The particular attention that Della Volpe gives to the 1843 *Critique* remains one of the characteristic features of his reflection. In direct opposition to the "Western" exegetes, who focus particularly on the *Manuscripts*, he finds the *Critique* "more important even if much less studied both in Italy and abroad . . . because it contains the most general premises of a *new* philosophical *method* in the form of a critique of Hegelian logic . . . which unmasks the 'mystifications' of the *a priori*, idealist, and speculative dialectic" (*Rousseau e Marx* [Rome: Editori Riuniti 1962], pp. 103-104). The *Critique* is for Della Volpe the crucial text of Marx's "epistemological break." Here lies a major difference between Della Volpe and Althusser. Althusser definitely overlooks the importance of the *Critique*, as well as of the other 1840-1844 "early works," which he sees as still Feuerbachian in essence (Louis Althusser, *For Marx* [New York, 1970],

pp. 31–39). So do Lloyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat, the American editors of *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1967), who have chosen to include the *Critique* under the heading, "Feuerbachian Criticism of Hegel." The essential difference between Marx's and Feuerbach's criticism of Hegel lies in the fact that Feuerbach characterizes the Hegelian abstraction as empty, robbed of empirical content, whereas Marx sees it, in Della Volpe's words, "viciously full of empirical content." The meaning of such "vicious fullness" will become clear later in this essay.

9. For a characterization of these two modes of abstraction with reference to the methodology of political economy, see M. Dobb, *Political Economy and Capitalism* (London: G. Routledge and Sons, 1937), pp. 130ff.

In making abstractions of particular elements in a situation, there are, broadly speaking, two roads along which one can proceed. In the first place one may build one's abstraction on the exclusion of certain features which are present in any actual situation, either because they are quantitatively of lesser importance in determining the course of the event or because they are more variable. To omit them from consideration makes the resulting calculation no more than an imperfect approximation to reality, but nevertheless makes it a very much more reliable guide than if the major factors had been omitted and only the minor influences taken into account. So it is that one creates the abstraction of a projectile which moves in a vacuum . . . in order to estimate what are the dominant factors which will govern the trajectory of an object propelled through a resistant medium. The correctness or otherwise of the particular assumption chosen *can only be determined by experience*: by knowledge of how actual situations behave, and of the actual difference made by the presence or absence of various factors. . . . Secondly, one may base ones' abstractions, not on any evidence of fact as to what features in a situation are essential and what are inessential, but simply on the formal procedure of combining the properties common to a heterogeneous assortment of situations and building abstraction out of analogy. . . . Within limits, of course, such a method is not only perfectly valid, but is an essential element in any generalization: a generalization is no generalization but an imaginary hypothesis unless what it generalizes is something common to the phenomena to which it refers. The danger of the method is of its being pushed too far, beyond the point where the factors which it embraces cease to be the major factors determining the nature of the problem which is in hand . . . [Here] exists the serious danger of *hypostasizing one's concepts*; of regarding the postulated relations as the determining ones in any actual situation, instead of contingent and determined by other features; and hence of presuming too readily that they will apply to novel or imperfectly known situations, with an abstract dogmatism as the result." [Emphases added.]

10. *Rousseau e Marx*, pp. 103–110.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

12. *Writings of the Young Marx*, p. 155.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
17. *Rousseau e Marx*, p. 108.
18. *Writings of the Young Marx*, p. 168.
19. *Rousseau e Marx*, p. 109.
20. *Kritik des Hegelschen Staatsrechts*, in Karl Marx, *Frühe Schriften I*, (Stuttgart, Cotta, 1962), p. 377. Translation by Dick Howard.
21. *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Dirk J. Struik, ed., (New York: International Publishers, 1964), p. 188.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
24. *Poverty of Philosophy* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), p. 104.
25. *Rousseau e Marx*, p. 120.
26. *Poverty*, p. 105.
27. *Rousseau e Marx*, p. 120.
28. *Poverty*, p. 106–107.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Published in *Poverty*, p. 197. For a counter-example, Della Volpe sends us back to *Capital*'s footnote on Proudhon's political proposal.

Proudhon begins by taking his ideal of justice, of “justice éternelle” from the juridical relations that correspond to the production of commodities . . . then he turns around and seeks to reform the actual production of commodities, and the actual legal system corresponding thereto, in accordance with this ideal. What opinion should we have of a chemist who, instead of studying the actual laws of the molecular changes in the composition and decomposition of matter, and on that foundation solving definite problems, claimed to regulate the composition and decomposition of matter by means of the “eternal ideas” of “naturalité” and “affinité”? Do we really know any more about “usury” when we say it contradicts “justice éternelle,” “équité éternelle,” and other “vérités éternelles” than the fathers of the church did when they said it was incompatible with “grâce éternelle,” “foi éternelle,” and “la volonté éternelle de Dieu?” [New York: International Publishers, 1967, Vol. I, p. 84.]

33. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Chicago: Kerr, 1911), p. 269. At times I had to depart from this translation.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*, p. 270.
36. The reactionary political meaning of the speculative method was fully exposed in the *Manifesto*:

The abolition of existing property relations is not at all a distinctive feature of Communism. The distinguishing feature of Communism is

not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property. . . . You are horrified at our doing away with private property. But in your existing society, private property is already done away for nine-tenths of the population. . . . In a word, you reproach us for intending to do away with your property. Precisely so; that is just what we intend. [*The Communist Manifesto* (New York: 1955), pp. 24ff.]

37. *Rousseau e Marx*, pp. 130–132.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
39. *La Libertà Comunista* (Milano: Ed. "Avanti!" 1963), p. 160.
40. *A Contribution*, p. 304.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*, p. 302.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 303.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *La Libertà*, p. 164.
46. Marx's method is "an adequate *logical* method" only because it is "the *historical* method stripped of . . . those chronological elements which are in fact *accidental, nonessential, irrational*." It is therefore "a method of elimination of all irrational precedents" (*Ibid.*).
47. *Ibid.*, p. 165. Emphasis added.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Logica come Scienza Positiva* (Messina-Firenze, 1956), p. 182.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Critica dell'Ideologia Contemporanea* (Rome: Ed. Riuniti, 1967), p. 29.
52. *Le Communisme et la Morale* (Paris, 1947), p. 92.
53. From the Greek "tautos" and "etheros": the same and the other.
54. Quoted in *Logica*, p. 124.
55. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
56. *Rousseau e Marx*, p. 109.
57. *Logica*, pp. 167–168
58. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
59. "Dialettica Scientifica e Teoria del Valore," Preface to E. V. Il'enkov, *La Dialettica dell'Astratto e del Concreto nel Capitale di Marx* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1961), p. viii.
60. *Ibid.*, p. ix.
61. *Ibid.*, p. xvi.
62. *Ibid.*, p. xi.
63. *Ibid.* Emphasis added.
64. *Ibid.*, p. xvii.
65. *Ibid.*

66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.*, p. vii.
68. "Marxism as Sociology" is, in fact, the title of one of Colletti's earliest essays (forthcoming in English in the volume *Ideology and Society*) and a main thesis of the Dellavolpean school. In this essay Colletti elaborates on a number of important consequences of Della Volpe's methodological reflection. His characterization of idealist and positivist trends in sociology in terms of their modes of abstraction is particularly noteworthy. Colletti examines the genesis of the concept of "society in general" ("social system," "community") typical of so much of contemporary "sociological theory." The sociologists who deal with society *in general*, he writes, are the ones who hold that societies have to be studied at the level of *ideological* social relations *alone*, or the ones who believe that the specific element of . . . human societies lies in 'consciousness.' At this point, says Colletti, "they are dealing with mere *products* or *moments of thought*. Their analyses no longer concern a *real* object, but a merely *ideal* one." As the real object vanishes, they will find it impossible to undertake the study of *facts* and concrete social processes for "they do not confront a *specific* society; all they have is the *idea* of society, society in general." However, to substitute "material" for "ideological" analysis, technology's history for the history of ideas, would not be a solution.

If any given society is bound to vanish into society in general as soon as its *ideology* alone is examined to the exclusion of *material* production-relations, the same thing will happen when only material production is taken into account, to the exclusion of all ideological relations. What is to become of "production" if one abstracts from that which makes of *material* production a production of *ideas* and of inter-human relations as well? Clearly, production will be reduced to the relationship of *single* men to nature, i.e. to a pre-social fact. . . . In the first case, when only ideological relations are taken into account, society disappears in the *Spirit*; in the second, when the material level is analyzed alone, society vanishes into the large frame of "*Nature*." The only way to deal with a "concrete society," therefore, lies in taking together production and distribution, material and social relations, economic structure and politico-ideological level, substructure and superstructure. But this becomes possible only if one draws from reality itself, thereby breaking with that method of *indeterminate or generic abstraction* which can only produce the two-fold abstraction of *Monsieur l'Esprit* and *Madame la Matière*. ["Marxismo come Sociologia," *Società*, 4 (1959), pp. 623ff.]

I regret that the monographic character of this essay does not allow for the discussion of Colletti's own thought. Lucio Colletti is an open-minded, original thinker. Although he did start from Della Volpe's theoretical platform, his research has gone far beyond Della Volpe's philosophical guidelines. For a sample of his work see his "Power and Democracy in Socialist Society," *New Left Review*, 56: (July/August 1969), pp. 18ff.

Louis Althusser and the Struggle for Marxism

Robin Blackburn and
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Louis Althusser's interpretation of Marx and Lenin has as yet commanded little sympathy from Marxists in English speaking countries. His work began to be known to them before they had assimilated the writings of those whom he attacks (the interpreters of Marx who stress the influence of Hegel). Since it is difficult to understand Althusser's critique without a prior understanding of the Marxism of the younger Lukács or the later Sartre, Althusser has been misconstrued as a capitulator to positivism in the realm of theory and as an unreconstructed Stalinist in the realm of politics for his attacks on the humanist disavowal of Stalin that developed within the Communist movement after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU.

In order to evaluate the substance of such criticisms, it is necessary to first give some account of Althusser's main theses (since these are not generally understood). Later we shall examine the criticisms that have commonly been leveled at Althusser in Britain and the United States. We hope to demonstrate that a more serious investigation of Althusser's Marxism is necessary.

Two preliminary points: First, the reader should not expect from Althusser the apocalyptic rhetoric of those Marxists for

whom the revolution is a philosophical rather than a political act—nothing less than the discovery of that Holy Grail of classical bourgeois philosophy, the “subject/object,” a “reality become conscious of itself.” For those possessed of this vision, the self-annihilating destiny of philosophy induces an understandable exaltation. For Althusser, on the other hand, philosophy has a more modest role, though it remains essential to the constitution of a revolutionary movement. Instead of displacing politics, it demonstrates its necessity. Second, the reader should bear in mind that although Althusser’s own work is largely concerned with epistemological and methodological questions, it has been his ambition to release Marxist theory from its obsession with these domains. It is certainly remarkable that whereas the Marxism inspired by the rediscovery of Hegel rarely ventured beyond the realms of philosophy and culture-criticism, the new interpretation of Marxism stimulated by Althusser has led in a very short space of time to new investigations in such diverse fields as economics, anthropology, aesthetics and political science. For reasons which will, we hope, shortly become apparent, the categories of Althusser’s Marxism have encouraged the concrete analysis of concrete situations—particularly, of those oppressions which do not seem to relate directly to the classical “main contradiction” of capitalism.

Reading Capital, the title of Louis Althusser’s major work, takes us to the center of his theoretical project. Althusser claims that most readings of *Capital* until now have been *innocent*—rarely going beyond surface commentary and textual elucidation, with the result that the true magnitude of the theoretical revolution accomplished by Marx has not been correctly appreciated. Surface readings, deceived by a continuity of language, have resulted in the interpretation of the whole of Marx’s work as the homogeneous development of a single system of thought. In opposition to this position, Althusser suggests the necessity of a *lecture symptômale* (“symptomatic reading”). Beneath the “visible” text lies another which is impervious to an innocent reading. This novel type of reading stems from the linguistic psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, which considers what is not said—the silences and absences—to be as significant as the visible text. In other words, the literal formulation of a text is not equivalent to what it really wants to say. The symptomatic reading is of central importance in the study of *Capital*. For Marx, according to

Althusser, did not possess, at the time he was composing *Capital*, the theoretical concepts and vocabulary in which to "think" and represent the revolutionary break that he had in fact made with all previous "ideological" forms of knowledge, including the works of his own youth.

The *lecture symptômale* is of capital importance to Althusser's interpretation of Marx. Without it he would have been forced to rely upon an innocent reading of the texts, and would not have been able to sustain the radical breach that he makes between the young and the old Marx. According to Althusser, after 1845 Marx made a *coupure épistémologique* (epistemological break). This concept is borrowed from Gaston Bachelard, and denotes a revolutionary mutation, in the history of a science, from an ideological and prescientific field of problems (or *problematic* as Althusser calls it) to an original and scientific system. By definition, the *coupure* is an act which retains nothing that preceded it and establishes an entirely new *problematic*. In Marx's case, it entailed a repudiation of the works of his youth and the ideological heritage that sustained them.

In brief, Althusser divides the stages of Marx's development into three periods.

First, there is the period 1840–1842, when Marx's thought, according to Althusser, was dominated by a rationalist humanism much closer to Kant and Fichte than to Hegel. Practically, Marx's political universe was defined by the struggle against censorship, against the feudal laws of the Rhineland, and against Prussian despotism. Theoretically, this struggle depended upon a conception of the essence of man as *liberty* and *reason*. Man's very nature destined him for liberty. Historically, feudalism had been liberty, but in its nonrational form of privilege; the modern state was liberty in the rational form of universal law. Thus, in the words of Marx, "philosophy demands that the State be the State of human nature."

Second, there is the period of 1842–1845, dominated by a new form of humanism, that of Feuerbach. The state had remained deaf to the call of reason. The Prussian regime, under its new monarch, had not reformed itself. In the consequent disillusion, the old humanism was ditched. According to the new theory, the abuses of the state were not distractions from its essence, but in fact reflected a real contradiction between its essence (reason) and its existence (unreason). This was the basis of the humanism of

Feuerbach. History was the alienation and production of reason in unreason, of the true man in the alienated man. Through the alienated products of his labor (commodities, religion, the state) man, without knowing it, was realizing his essence. In contrast to the earlier humanism, there was no longer an appeal to the state to become itself, since the state was the product of alienation. Instead, there was to be an alliance between philosophy and the proletariat; for in philosophy man was affirmed in theory, while in the proletariat he was denied in practice. Philosophy would give the proletariat the theory of what it was, while in return the proletariat would provide armed force for a "communist" revolution. At the end of history man would once again become subject, would reappropriate his essence which had been alienated in property, and would become again true man.

Third, the period after 1845: the period of the *coupure épistémologique*. At this time, Marx broke with all theory that founded history and politics on human essence. This rupture with his past was comprised of three main aspects. First, the foundation of a theory of history and politics based upon entirely new concepts (which will be discussed below)—social formation, forces of production, relations of production, superstructures, ideologies, "determination in the last instance" by the economic, and the relative autonomy of different structures. Second, a radical critique of the theoretical pretensions of all philosophical humanism. Third, the definition of humanism itself as an ideology. According to Althusser, this rupture with philosophical anthropology (in the Feuerbachian sense) and with all forms of philosophical humanism is inseparable from the birth of Marxism as a science.

By definition, these concepts could have no place in the new problematic. The old problematic was summed up in Marx's sixth thesis on Feuerbach to the effect that there is a universal essence of Man and that this essence is the attribute of individuals taken in isolation, who are its real subjects. This basic postulate implied the empiricist-idealistic conception of the world: either an empiricism of the subject and an idealism of essence or conversely an idealism of the subject and an empiricism of essence. According to Althusser, this problematic not only formed the basis of previous theories of society (from Hobbes to Rousseau), of political economy (from Petty to Ricardo), and of ethics (from Descartes to Kant), but also of theories of knowledge, idealist

as well as materialist, from Locke through Kant to Feuerbach. At the center of all these systems is the human subject; the basic concepts of all these systems of thought are thought to be immediately given by experience. By rejecting human essence as the theoretical foundation of philosophy, Marx rejected a whole organic set of postulates—in history, political economy, ethics, and philosophy itself.

Marx therefore did not simply found a new theory of the history of societies in founding historical materialism. By replacing the conceptual arena of subject/essence by a dialectical historical materialism of the different specific levels of human practice (economic, political, ideological, scientific), he also created a new philosophy with infinite implications.

If this is the nature of Marx's *coupure épistémologique*, why do concepts derived from Hegel and Feuerbach—in other words, from the prescientific and ideological past—such as alienation, negation of negation, fetishism, and Marx's remarks upon the relationship between the Hegelian dialectic and his own in the preface to *Capital*, continue to be employed in Marx's work until the end of his life? The answer, in Althusser's words, is that "the whole history of the beginnings of sciences or of great philosophies shows . . . that the exact set of new concepts do not march out on parade in single file; on the contrary, some are long delayed, or march in borrowed clothes before acquiring their proper uniforms—for as long as history fails to provide the tailor and the cloth." In the interim new concepts are certainly present in the corpus—but in disguise. If this will suffice to show why Hegelian terminology continues to be used in *Capital*, although in fact denoting completely new structures and articulations, then the conclusion can be drawn that the real theoretical implications of Marxism cannot be drawn out from a simple reading of Marx, but necessitate the *lecture symptômale* in order to make the silences speak and the disguises fall away.

On this basis Althusser attempts to reconstitute Marxism by rigorously separating it from its own ideological past and from those who have attempted to keep it imprisoned within that past. His analysis of the Hegelian dialectic demonstrates its radical dissimilarity from that of Marx. In the Hegelian dialectic, there is, in Althusser's words, a type of circular unity of equivalent elements, whose mode of articulation is determined by their interiorization in the Idea. The Hegelian totality implies a

simple and original unity of the concept in which different social realities are phenomenal expressions, mere exteriorizations of the auto-development of the Idea. The possibility that one of these exteriorizations might be dominant is excluded.

For Marxism, the "totality" has a quite different meaning. It is, by definition, a complex structure of objective and specific levels that are not equivalent and are relatively autonomous within a historically determined social formation. In the last instance, it is true, the structure is always determined by the economic. But this determinant role of the economic in the Marxist totality has a quite different meaning from the determinant role of the Idea in the Hegelian totality. If the Marxist totality were merely an inverted form of the Hegelian totality, the contradictions of a capitalist society could in the last instance be expressed as a "pure" contradiction between capital and labor. But, as Althusser puts it, "the lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes." The transition from capitalism to socialism never comes about through a pure and final manifestation of the contradiction between labor and capital or between the forces and relations of production. This was not the case in the Russian or Chinese revolutions. Nor was it the case, as is evidenced by Marx's own writings, in France in 1848–1851.

The reason for this is not that history has in some disappointing way failed to live up to theory—which would indeed be the case if Marxism were an inverted form of Hegelianism. It is rather, as Althusser says, that in the Marxist totality, "the capital-labor contradiction is never simple, but always specified by the historically concrete forms and circumstances in which it is exercised"; or more briefly, a contradiction in the Marxist totality is always *overdetermined*. In other words, the role of the economic in the Marxist totality is not that of an "essence" of which all other forms of social practice (political, ideological, theoretical) are exteriorizations. For in fact, the *dominant* contradiction in a social formation will at any given time occur on another level—whether political or ideological. What the economic base determines in the last instance is *which* element is to be dominant in a given social formation. Marx himself expressed this thought very clearly when he wrote that, "the middle ages could not live on Catholicism, nor the Ancient World on politics. On the contrary, it is the economic conditions of the time that explain why here politics and there religion played the chief part. It

requires but slight acquaintance with the history of the Roman republic to be aware that its secret history is the history of its landed property. On the other hand Don Quixote long ago paid the penalty for wrongly imagining that knight errantry was compatible with all economic forms of society."

If the Marxist totality is characterized by the irreducible complexity ascribed to it by Althusser, why have so many of Marx's followers interpreted Marxism either as an inverted Hegelianism or else as a type of mechanistic positivism? Here Althusser comes to the most radical and novel point in his interpretation. For he suggests that Marx struggled toward an entirely new conception of causality which, although it is found in a practical state throughout his later writings, he was unable to formulate conceptually.

The last four hundred years of Western philosophy have been dominated by two major types of causal determination. The first is the mechanistic conception, Cartesian in origin, which reduces causality to a transitive and analytic effectivity. Explanations based on this model of causality could not "think" the effect of the whole on its parts, since the whole was seen merely as the resultant or sum of its parts. The second model of causal determination was formulated by G. W. Leibnitz and developed most dramatically by Hegel. This model aimed precisely to think the effect of the whole on its parts. It presupposes that the whole is reducible to an inner essence, of which the elements of the whole are then no more than its phenomenal expressions. But while it could think the effect of the whole, it could not, by definition, think of the whole as a structure. It had to presuppose that the whole had a certain nature, precisely the nature of a spiritual whole in which each element was expressive of the entire totality as a *pars totalis* (Leibnitz's monadology).

These two forms of causality are to be found in most contemporary social theory from conventional positivism to the great sociological system builders: the former lean toward mechanistic causality, the latter toward the model of the "expressive totality." In Marxism mechanistic causality dominated the schemas of many of the official Second and Third International philosophers (e.g., Kautsky, Bukharin); the "expressive totality" was to be found in the Hegelian inspired reinterpretations of the Left Communists (e.g., Lukács, Korsch).

However, Marx's discovery of the new scientific "continent"

of the social formation and its variations required that he develop a new conception of causality that would provide an adequate understanding of the pre-given complexity of a mode of production. Althusser calls this new conception of causality "structural" or "metonymic" causality. It is designed to "think" the existence of a structure in its effects insofar as the whole existence of the structure consists precisely in its effects, the structure being merely a specific combination of its peculiar elements and nothing beyond its effects.

Marx, while using this form of causality in his studies, was unable to express his discovery in an appropriate language. He made constant efforts to break away from the linguistic prison of the "expressive totality" (essence/phenomena; apparent/real; surface/hidden). But his efforts remained largely inarticulate, an accumulation of metaphors which glimpse but do not grasp his discovery. This is most vividly illustrated in the 1857 "Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy" where he wrote,

In all forms of society it is a determinate production and its relations which assign every other production and its relations their rank and influence. It is a general illumination (or light) in which all the other colors are plunged and which modifies their tonalities. It is a special ether which defines the specific weight of every existence arising within it.

From this passage it is clear that the effects are not outside the structure, are not a pre-existing object or an element of space in which the structure arrives to imprint its mark. On the contrary, Marx implies that the structure is immanent in its effects so that the whole existence of the structure consists of its effects and is merely the specific combination of its peculiar elements. This type of structural causality is also employed in Freudian psychoanalysis, which in elaborating the structure of the unconscious unknowingly has been forced by the same scientific necessity to reject mechanistic or expressive causality. Hence Althusser's borrowing of terms like "overdetermination," "displacement," or "condensation" from psychoanalysis to express the functioning of the social formation are not arbitrary but in fact proceed from a real heuristic analogy.

Once the complex and asymmetrical structure of the Marxist totality and the particular causal effectivity of the structure on its elements is conceded, it follows that a historicist interpretation of Marxism cannot be valid. For the historicist, Marxism is the

philosophy of our epoch, the self-awareness of capitalist society. But for scientific socialism what makes the system intelligible is the form of articulation established between relatively autonomous elements that are determined in the last instance by the economy, not the problem of origin of the structure.

Historicist Marxists who rejected the mechanical economism of the Second International did allow for the influence of the superstructure on the base, but they interpreted it, in idealist terms, as a sort of rebound of the phenomena on the essence. Furthermore, looking back to Hegel rather than to Marx, this historicist school (which has included Lukács, Korsch, Gramsci, and Sartre) implicitly or explicitly assumed (1) a continuous homogeneity of time expressed in successive totalities in the development of the Idea, or of the economy, or the totalizing agent; and (2) a contemporaneity of time, *i.e.*, that the structure of historical existence is such that all the elements of the whole coexist in the same time and the same present (the Leibnitzian sense of *pars totalis*). These two conceptions are inseparable from the idea of the expressive totality and the conception of causal effectiveness that underlies it. But, once this problematic of essence/phenomena is rejected, it follows that there is no "history in general," but only different histories, different temporalities specific to different levels of the complex structures of different modes of production. Thus, in contrast to the Hegelian historicist problematic, it is not the genesis of the totality which gives meaning to its structure, but the mode of articulation of structures themselves that provides through theoretical practice a key to the type of dominance of a specific level in a given social formation, and to the form of relationship between the role of this dominant contradiction and the determination by the economic in the last instance.

Underlying this assault on the essentialism and idealism of "humanist" interpretations of Marx is an insistence on the productive nature of *theoretical practice*. Accepting any concept as a mere given leads, according to Althusser, to ideology rather than knowledge. The ideologies of empiricism, whether of subject or object, and of idealism, whether of object or subject, lead to a closure which arrests theoretical practice precisely at its most important point. Theory for Althusser must take ultimate responsibility for all the knowledges which it produces; there is no place for a virgin-birth directly from experience.

Althusser claims that all production is of fundamentally the

same type, even though he only establishes this by analogy. There are four kinds of production: material, political, cultural, and theoretical. Each is also a practice. For instance the practice of theory results in the production of a knowledge. Each is specific. Thus the practice of theory takes place entirely within the process of thought. This schema rejects the original unity of praxis postulated by Sartre, Lukács, Gramsci, etc. Since *Capital* is a theoretical product it cannot be juxtaposed to history seen as a succession of events nor to the immediacy of everyday experience—and it can only be verified by theoretical procedures. As Althusser is fond of insisting, it is because Marxism is true that it has been applied with success; it is not because it has been applied with success that it is true.

Althusser divides the practice of theory into three “generalities”: (1) the raw material—ideological or prescientific theories, *not* pure experience; (2) the tools in material production or the methods of science in theoretical production; and (3) the commodity in material production, or the knowledge produced in theoretical production. When the first level is dominant the result is empiricism; while dominance of the third level leads to speculative reason. But in Marxism, and in all true science, it is practice within the second level which predominates—the work of transforming raw ideological materials into knowledge. This theoretical practice is scientific production; it is not a part of the superstructure, and therefore cannot be historicized in the way attempted by Gramsci and Sartre. Thus, as Bachelard writes, “a science positively establishes itself by constructing its abstractions, its theoretical apparatus, its original concepts, which it employs in a systematic and demonstrative way.”

Marxism is thus conceived as a science specific to the theoretical object it has constructed, the “social formation.” What differentiates one social formation from another is the method whereby surplus labor is extracted from the direct producers. Instead of an evolutionary myth of successive stages of history there is the elaboration of the different basic elements which in different combinations produce different modes of production.¹ In other words, it is not only the Marxist concept of the social totality which has a structural complexity but also the Marxist concept of the mode of production.

It is with these tools of intellectual production that Althusserian Marxists such as Nicos Poulantzas, Maurice Godelier, Michel Verrett, and Emmanuel Terray have undertaken concrete

investigations in the field of politics, economics and anthropology. They refuse to accept at their face value the social relations lived and experienced by men; for them, "men make history but they do not know what they do." The task of theory is to identify within social relations the dominance of an absence, that "immense machine" or "play without an author," which assigns to every agent and object in the complex structure its place and function.

Let us now turn to the implications of Althusser's Marxism as well as to some of the criticisms which have been leveled against it.

One of the first things to remember is that Althusser's theory of reading is also a theory of writing. Althusser is much given to Delphic formulations. Their meaning is clear enough so long as the reader is prepared to accept, at least provisionally, his distaste for the deceptive obviousness of linear discourse. Take for example Althusser's apparent dogmatism. Despite his self-proclaimed orthodoxy it is clear that Althusser's interpretation of Marx, simply because it departs so far from the letter of Marx's own writings, has produced a thorough-going recasting of all received ideas about the nature of Marxism. His goal is not to discover the hidden spring from which the pristine truth of all Marx's writings can be shown to flow. Rather he acknowledges the multiplicity of Marx's positions in order to reconstitute that Marx who was most revolutionary in a scientific sense, and hence also in a political sense. The Marx that interests Althusser is the Marx adequate to the task of revolution, not the Marx of the academic history of ideas.

In any case a purely textual approach toward Marx falls into hopeless confusion. A surface study of Marx's writing would reveal that he expressed a great many reactionary views at one time or another, not excluding sentiments tinged with racism, colonialism, male chauvinism, sexual bigotry, indeed the whole gamut of Victorian prejudices. What is most astonishing in Marx's work is not the survival of the conventional prejudices of the early bourgeois epoch but rather the extent to which the new science which he founded allowed him to construct a theory capable of routing all such ideologies, even though he was himself at times still their victim.

This insistence upon the scientific character of Marxism has frequently been a source of misunderstanding. Anglo-Saxon culture has been so thoroughly permeated by positivism that those

who reject it often reject science per se along with it. Even those who dispute its application to the social sciences often concede that positivism provides an adequate account of the methods of the natural sciences. Such an approach clearly abandons the field to positivism, granting it rights over a decisive area of knowledge.

Althusser's conception of science, which he draws from Bachelard, has striking similarities with the antipositivist school of the Anglo-Saxon philosophy of science, notably the work of Paul Feyerabend and Thomas Kuhn. Thus, both Feyerabend and Althusser reject the empiricist notion that the scientist's techniques give him access to some privileged species of experience which can provide an adequate foundation for scientific truth. But while this critique leads Feyerabend to the rehabilitation of all varieties of experience, including those denounced by empiricism as speculative or metaphysical, it leads Althusser to reject altogether the notion that scientific truth is in some way based on experience.

When Althusser insists on the scientific character of Marxism he conceives of it as a new science founded on the constitution of a new theoretical object: the social formation. This does not confer on all of Marx's hypotheses the infallibility that vulgar positivism ascribes to natural science, nor even the probabilistic validity asserted by its more sophisticated exponents. Marxism is a science, like biology or psychoanalysis, with its own object and its own procedures. It is not to be seen as a particular hypothesis within some postulated Universal Science. The conditional validity of its propositions depends on the internal articulation and development of its discourse, not upon the pseudo-innocence of any appeal to experience or experiment.

The cutting edge of Althusser's insistence on the scientific character of Marxism is his wish to purge it of ideological residues. Ideology does not become more acceptable to Marxist philosophy simply because it is "revolutionary": indeed it is precisely ideology of this sort which is most calculated to mystify political practice since it invariably imagines that it has solved in the theoretical domain problems which, in fact, can only be solved by political practice. Althusser is fond of quoting Spinoza's dictum that the concept "dog" cannot bark, because he knows that too many Marxists imagine that the concept "Dialectic" can conjure away any intellectual problem or even make the revolution.²

In order to defend the possibility of the union of theory and practice in political practice, Althusser rejects the identity of theory and practice with each other, the denial of the specific and irreducible role of theoretical practice. He argues that most of the classical deviations within Marxism stem from an attempt to flatten into each other the practices of theory and politics or of economics and politics. Thus, spontaneism endows political practice with the qualities of philosophy and theory; anarchosyndicalism attributes to economic practice all the active and even explosive virtues of politics; voluntarism entrusts to political consciousness and will the determinism of the economic. All such reductions have fundamentally the same structure as the economicistic and mechanistic Marxism of the Second International. In very diverse ways they read into the social formation the course of the revolution which it should be the duty of revolutionaries to make. Reality is prestructured by the revolutionary project, thus lightening, as if by magic, the load of the revolutionaries.

By contrast, Althusser's Marxism leads to concrete investigations of the field of revolutionary action. The Marxism of the Second International led to an analysis of capitalism which perceived in its economic entrails the sign of its forthcoming collapse; the Marxism inspired by the return to Hegel led to eloquent but impotent critiques of the culture engendered by capitalist social relations. Althusser's Marxism leads to the deciphering of the complex web of contradictions through which the revolutionary movement must achieve its aims. It refuses to build into theory the liberation which the masses can only achieve in politics. In an essay on the Italian painter Cremonini, Althusser has given us a valuable clue to his thinking on this point:

The method of Cremonini thus borrows from that which the revolutionary thinkers have opened to man, the great materialist thinkers who have understood that the liberty of men is achieved not by its complacent affirmation in ideology but by knowledge of the laws of their servitude, and that the "realization" of their concrete individuality is achieved by the knowledge and mastery of the abstract relations which govern them.³

One might add that just as the great theoreticians of liberation have eschewed a rhetoric of the ideal, so every repressive social order is replete with celebrations of freedom, justice, brotherhood, and the entire litany of ideology.

Having suggested the significance of Althusser's general assault

on ideology, let us examine a particular case, the concept of alienation. "Alienation" is in many ways the key concept in the humanist interpretation of Marxism. Its fatal defect from the standpoint of scientific socialism is that it is inextricably tied to a pre-Marxist ideological problematic. Strictly used, it is not a sociological but an *ontological* category which predicates a human essence. Because of this, "alienation" lacks the specificity demanded of a scientific concept: man can be alienated in private property, in the state, in his labor, in the family, in religion and doubtless in many other ways as well. Yet the concept does not encourage precise investigations of its different forms; instead, it prejudgets the issue by assuming some underlying homology between these different aspects of alienation.

By contrast, the concept of the "surplus" (and its different forms of extraction), as used by Marx in *Capital*, refers directly to a basic constitutive element of all class societies. Unlike the concept "alienation," it does not inhabit some self-sufficient philosophical realm, but encourages us to comprehend its specific articulation in a specific mode of production, thereby clarifying how the extraction of surplus labor in class societies takes the specific form of the extraction of surplus value under capitalism. The key concepts of scientific Marxism, like surplus labor, forces and relations of production, fetishism, etc., indicate scientifically the field of revolutionary action. These concepts do not, at the same time, burden those struggling for emancipation with an ideology of human essence—the human ideal necessary to the ideologies of man's alienation is itself scarred and deformed by the repressive society in which this ideal has been conceived. We may note that the idea of alienation logically entails the idea of "disalienation"; which introduces us to a world where man invents himself anew each moment and exercises an uncircumscribed and complete control over all the forces and manifestations of social life. Man becomes God, a true master of all creation. The real and concrete possibilities of liberation are only volatilized in such an intoxicated vision.

If Althusser is right, revolutionaries should prefer to this heady vision a sober assessment of the determinations amidst which men make the history they do not know. Althusser's own approach to the question of determinations within the field of the social formation is evidently much richer than that elaborated by most earlier interpretations of Marx. What scientific advances

does Althusser's structural conception of causality enable us to make? First it encourages us to think in terms of different forms of determination arising at different levels of the structure. Thus the conception of negative determinism, the acknowledgment of objective limits to variations in the structure, belongs to the level of the *forces* of production. For example, modern industrial production implies relations of appropriation incompatible with that of feudalism, or small peasant production, relations incompatible with full socialism. On the other hand, the given level of the forces of production does not imply or make possible only one particular social formation. Likewise, to the level of the *relations* of production belongs the specific determination of specific ideologies, the policies of bourgeois governments, etc. And beyond these levels the notion of structural causality enables us to see the ways in which, in Althusser's words, *the determinant selects the dominant*. Thus at a given moment, such as the Russia of 1917, the contradictions unleashed by imperialism overdetermine the existence of a revolutionary situation at the weakest link in the system—that is to say, the economic founds the dominance of the political (as seen in the action of the revolutionary party).⁴

Althusser's interpretation of these and other points has led him to be incorrectly identified as a "structuralist" or even a functionalist. But this is most misleading. The theory of overdetermination really asserts that each instance of social practice reflects every other instance. Such a method of inquiry does not simply itemize each causal factor and attribute to it a quantitative impact on the total situation. Rather it asserts a *qualitative* hierarchy of different social levels—there is a structure of structures. Such an approach is thus distinct from even the most sophisticated deployment of a stratified system model (as in *Technology and the Moral Order* by Alvin Gouldner and R. A. Peterson).⁵

Moreover each instance of social practice does not simply "interact" with each other instance but can be in a state of *contradiction* with it. It is at this point that Althusser's Marxism is most clearly opposed to the "structuralist" school with which he has been wrongly assimilated. In the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss there may be a structure and the ideology which a society produces to account for it—but there is never an actual clash of discrepant structures. For Althusser the possibility of such a clash is a necessary consequence of the relative autonomy of the

different levels of social practice combined with the ultimate determinance of the economic. It is the clash of discrepant structures (e.g., forces and relations of production) which produces historical development. Lévi-Strauss, whose account of society has no clearly articulated hierarchy of levels and no conception of contradictions between such levels, can thus have no scientific theory of history. Instead structuralist anthropology leads either to the complete neglect of history or to a return to simple empiricism ("one thing after another," a mere sequence of events).

Although Althusser's own work draws from many non-Marxist sources (Jacques Lacan, the *Annales* historians, Gaston Bachelard, structuralist linguistics and anthropology) it constitutes a theoretical system which ultimately defines itself only in terms of Marx's scientific revolution.

Althusser seeks to make Marxist epistemology and the fundamental axioms for the study of social formations explicit. But as he says on the very first page of *Reading Capital* there has always been an understanding of Marx's work, even when it was beneath the true level of theory, "in the writings and speeches of those who have read it for us, well or ill, both the dead and the living, Engels, Kautsky, Plekhanov, Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky, Stalin, Gramsci, the leaders of the workers organisations, their supporters and opponents. . . ." In the best of this work Marxism is to be found in "a practical state." Lenin's analysis of the revolutionary situation existing in Russia in 1917 and Mao's distinction between primary and secondary aspects of the contradictions present in the Chinese conjuncture in the 1930s, are cited as models of Marxist analysis which exemplify what is meant by the "overdetermination" of political situation. Althusser seeks to present the methodology of such analysis in a generally accessible form so that it can be developed in the concrete analysis of other concrete situations. Thus Althusser's former pupil, Régis Debray, sought to examine the specific, overdetermined characteristics of revolutionary struggle in Latin America.

One confirmation that Althusser has at least partially succeeded in achieving a general theoretical formulation of the method of Marxist analysis is that his schema seems to apply even to currents within Marxism to which he is himself opposed. Thus some of Trotsky's most characteristic theses also exemplify structural causality and the effects of overdetermination. The theory of "permanent revolution" emphasizes the presence of a structure in its absences, since the possibility of a proletarian

revolution in Russia revolves upon the impossibility of a full bourgeois development in the lands dominated by imperialism. Trotsky's analysis of how the economic backwardness of Russia, the cultural inheritance of Tsarism and the political isolation of the early Soviet Republic fused in Stalinism can be seen as an example of what is meant by overdetermination. Trotsky's insistence on the revisionist degeneration represented by the Stalinist bureaucracy was accompanied by his insistence that the Soviet social formation was noncapitalist: Trotsky refused to liquidate the contradictory character of the Soviet State by any appeal to the logic of the expressive totality which would insist that it must be capitalist if it was not socialist.

An even more arresting case of the implicit presence of concepts which Althusser has made fully explicit is to be found in Lukács' remarkable study, *Lenin*. In this work Lukács breaks fully with his ultra-left political positions and partially with the theoretical positions which accompanied them. Confrontation with Lenin's theoretical achievement forced the supreme exponent of historicist Marxism to consider repeatedly the theoretical and political significance of the overdetermined structure of historical conjunctures. Compare, for example, Althusser's discussion of why "the theory of the weakest link is identical with the theory of the decisive link"⁶ and Lukács' statement that "(Lenin's) basic political principle before the seizure of power was to discover those factors in the tangle of interwoven social tendencies of declining capitalism whose exploitation by the proletariat was capable of transforming it into the leading-ruling-class in society."⁷ A stress on the law of uneven development which is to be found in all those Marxists who combine theoretical and political practice (above all Lenin, Trotsky and Mao) appears also in this work: "the total development of society in the era of capitalism by no means follows a simple, straight line."⁸ Lukács bases himself on this law to demonstrate the necessity of class alliances⁹ and the nature of revolutionary *realpolitik* ("the need to take into account all existing tendencies in every concrete situation by no means implies that all are of equal weight when decisions are taken"¹⁰). The purpose of these remarks is not to hunt for merely superficial resemblances but to show Althusser's real achievement in formulating in an explicit and systematic fashion the methodological and epistemological assumptions underlying the best Marxist analysis.

This brings up directly the question of the political implica-

tions of Althusser's work. As is well known he is a member of the French Communist party though in no sense an official philosopher of it: indeed his works are not published by the Party publishing house and he has criticized the Party publicly on occasion (see, for example, his contributions to *La Pensée* on the May events in 1968). More to the point, his ideas have led to the formation of left currents within the European Communist Parties and have been taken up and critically assimilated by both Maoist and Trotskyist writers. Many of the most persuasive critics of Althusser have been former pupils such as Glucksman, Miller, and Rancière who have rejected his political reticence and complicity with a revisionist Party. Althusser's attitude to the French Communist Party seems to combine sentimentality, empiricism, and opportunism. His first contact with the Party was in the resistance against German occupation during the war. Since then he has clearly been influenced by the fact that in a purely sociological sense the PCF is the party of the French working class. Moreover Althusser's political thinking is clearly dominated by a highly ideological conception of an international workers movement to which the PCF, the Soviet leaders, Mao Tse-tung, Fidel Castro, and the leaders of the Vietnamese revolution all belong. In this way the heroic achievements of the Vietnamese are thought to cancel out the abysmal political record of the French Communists. Althusser's idea of a "world Communist movement" might well be compared to Erasmus's conception of Christendom. In both cases there is an attempt to combine a highly original and critical system of thought with an emotional need for ecumenism. But although the connection between Althusser's political deviations and his theoretical work must be closely studied, this must not be undertaken on the assumption that there is a necessary and complete identity between the two. Lenin was a merciless opponent of theoretical deviations yet he never sought to dismiss Plekhanov's contribution to Marxist theory (and Plekhanov's political capitulations were at least as serious as those of Althusser).

In the domain of theory Althusser has a number of signal achievements to his credit. He has set new standards of rigor in the discussion of questions of Marxist epistemology. Whereas formerly there was a tendency for the "historicism" school to have a monopoly of philosophical sophistication, there are now signs of a real intellectual renaissance within Marxism. He has sought

to integrate within Marxism scientific advances which have occurred outside it and in the process greatly extended the range of explanatory concepts and models available to Marxists. Above all Althusser has developed a critique of "Western" Marxism, the Marxism of Lukács, Korsch, Gramsci, and Sartre. Through no choice of its authors this Marxism was developed at a great distance from mass political practice from the mid-1920s up to the most recent times. In a way Althusser's own work is a part of this tradition, yet he helps us to draw a line under it—to see its inherent limits. This can only encourage us to study those Marxisms which were always more linked to political practice and to develop Marxism in the direction of more concrete studies. Althusser furnishes a persuasive critique of those theorists who think they can conjure up the revolution with incantations of the Dialectic or through mystical communion with some privileged revolutionary subject whether it be the peasantry of the Third World or the proletariat of the advanced capitalist countries.

The logic of Althusser's Marxism encourages us to study the given complexity of contradictions both within any one country and in the world as a whole. It allows us to think through the necessary connections between the anti-imperialist struggle in the Third World, the anticapitalist struggle in the West and the antibureaucratic struggle in the East. If these different struggles are not correctly located at the theoretical level, it will be impossible to coordinate them at the level of political practice. Such diverse struggles would then inhibit rather than strengthen each other. A stress on the intercalation of overdetermined contradictions and a rejection of the false simplicity of the "expressive totality" would seem to provide the correct epistemological starting point for an internationalist politics. This is equally true of revolutionary struggle within a single country, where political practice is posed with the same inescapable complexity. Within the decisive revolutionary class, the proletariat, it is necessary to achieve a proper combination of economic, political, and cultural practice. It is also necessary to unite the revolutionary struggle of the working class with the parallel struggles of particular oppressed groups (women, blacks, etc.). Althusserian categories seem particularly apt for establishing the connections between the diverse forms of repression in modern capitalist social formations, without at the same time collapsing one form of struggle

into another. In most imperialist countries, populist politics (with its mystic evocations of "the people," "the movement," etc.) has already demonstrated its bankruptcy.¹¹ No revolutionary who wishes to extricate himself and his comrades from this ideological swamp can afford to ignore the weapons of scientific criticism put at his disposal by Althusser.¹²

Notes

1. Étienne Balibar, in his very important contribution to *Reading Capital*, distinguishes the following elements which coexist and define one another within a specific mode of production: (1) the laborer; (2) the means of production (including both the object of labor and the means of labor); (3) the nonworker who appropriates surplus value; (4) the property connection between the above; and (5) the material appropriation connection between them.
2. In too much Marxist writing the appearance of the concept of the dialectic simply signals the presence of a theoretical problem which has not been resolved or even properly confronted. Thus, one is assured that the relations between the base and the superstructure or between the revolutionary party and the masses are "dialectical," as if this solved any problems. Often the term refers to nothing more exact than a simple relation of interaction; what is evaded is the precise nature of this interaction. Or, worse, it is assumed that the interaction in question is completely *symmetrical* and *equivalent*. One virtue of Althusser's categories is that they begin the task of exploring the differing types of relations involved, distinguishing the action of the base on the superstructure from the action of the superstructure on the base, etc.
3. To be published in *Lenin and Philosophy* (New Left Books, London, 1971).
4. As the notion of "structural causality" is both difficult and important an example may help to illuminate it. In the *Eighteenth Brumaire* Marx argues that it was the existence, at the economic level, of extensive dispersed peasant small-holding which determined the dominance, at the political level, of the regime of Napoleon III. Barrington Moore's *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966) furnishes both positive and negative examples of the workings of structural causality. Thus his account of the conflict between the North and the South in the American Civil War does not offer a directly economic explanation of the conflict. Rather he suggests that the rivalry between the Northern bourgeoisie and the Southern slave-owners was predominantly political in nature in that both needed to control a state apparatus of their own, though there was no purely economic incom-

pability between the different economic systems in the two regions. Though Barrington Moore produces many structural insights of this sort, which places his book in a category of its own within academic historiography, the book as a whole gives an account of the trajectory of the bourgeois revolutions in various countries without relating them to the structural context they helped to constitute—namely, the general history of capitalism and imperialism.

5. Of all the Anglo-Saxon social theorists the work of Alvin Gouldner seems closest to that of Althusser: for example Gouldner's use of concepts taken from the "mature" Marx ("labor power" in *Wildcat Strike*, "exploitation" in his contribution to *Social Psychology*), his stress on the relative autonomy of "parts" of the social system or on the necessity of developing scientific criteria specific to the study of society. However such resemblances are quite deceptive since for Gouldner the "reflexive sociologist" is credited with the same historicist potentiality as Lukács' proletariat: the sociologist who achieves success in the arduous task of self-awareness in his role as sociologist thus illuminates the social realm as a whole (cf. *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*). For Althusser, Gouldner's "reflexive sociology" would not simply be divorced from the class struggle but would be vitiated by idealism of the subject and empiricism of the essence at the epistemological level.
6. Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (New York: Vintage, 1970), p. 180.
7. Georg Lukács, *Lenin* (London: New Left Books, 1970), p. 78.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
11. Indeed there is a strongly developed "movement" ideology which it must be the duty of scientific Marxism to combat. For Lenin and Mao the term "people" could only be properly constituted on the basis of an exact class analysis and should in no way be used as a substitute for such analysis. Other highly ideological terms now current would include: "the movement," where this term is *counter-posed* to all concretely organized political groups; "the organizer" who is not *himself* politically organized; "consciousness raising," where this involves the idealist implication that consciousness can be divorced from definite forms of organization and practice; and "revolutionary collectives/communes," which are too often middle-class therapy groups cutting themselves off from the masses, instead of uniting the most advanced layers of every section of the exploited and oppressed as does the revolutionary party.

12. Instead of weighing down the text of this essay with footnotes we have chosen to provide this brief guide to the writings of Althusser, his followers and some of his more important critics.

To date Althusser has published four books and numerous essays, and he has edited and translated a selection of Feuerbach's writings. His first book was a study of Montesquieu (Paris: Presses Universitaires Françaises, 1957). He then published a collection of essays, *Pour Marx*

(Paris: Maspero, 1965) and a symposium *Lire le Capital* (Paris: Maspero, 1965) which expounded his interpretation of Marx. A later work *Lénine et la Philosophie* (Paris: Maspero, 1966) extends this interpretation to Lenin's philosophical writings. Althusser is believed to have written at least two other books which he has not published as this would endanger his position in the PCF. His essays usually appear in the French philosophical review, *La Pensée*. Between 1965 and 1968 he also published anonymously a number of studies in the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes* published by a Marxist-Leninist study circle formed at the Ecole Normale under his influence. Three issues of this publication, believed to be written entirely by Althusser, provided a sympathetic analysis of the Chinese cultural revolution.

Simply for the sake of brevity our account of Althusser's thought does not attempt to discuss the important changes and development in his position in successive publications. On the whole we concentrated attention on the positions adopted by Althusser at the time when *Pour Marx* and *Lire le Capital* were published, though we did not discuss discrepancies between these two works themselves. Althusser's more recent positions can be noted in his introduction to the English edition of *For Marx* and in his comments on the translator's glossary in this edition and in the English edition of *Reading Capital*. The interview with Althusser in *New Left Review*, no. 64 (November–December 1970) and the introduction by Althusser to the Garnier-Flammarion edition of *Capital* (Paris, 1969) give further evidence of changes in his position on such important questions as the relation between science and class struggle, the dangers of intellectualism, and so on. Many of Althusser's more recent essays will be found in the English edition of *Lenin and Philosophy* (London: New Left Books, 1971).

A very large number of French writers on social theory have been influenced by Althusser but the influence is most marked in the following:

- Alain Badiou, *Le concept du modèle* (Paris: Maspero, 1969)
- André Glucksmann, *Le discours de la guerre* (Paris: L'Herne, 1968)
- Maurice Godelier, *Rationalité et irrationalité en économie* (Paris: Maspero, 1966)
- Pierre Macherey, *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire* (Paris: Maspero, 1967)
- Nicos Poulantzas, *Pouvoir politique et classes sociales* (Paris: Maspero, 1967)
- Nicos Poulantzas, *Dictature et fascisme* (Paris: Maspero, 1971)
- Emmanuel Terray, *Le Marxisme devant les sociétés 'primitives'* (Paris: Maspero, 1969)

The writings of Régis Debray and Charles Bettelheim also shows considerable use of Althusserian modes of analysis. For an Althusserian critique of the Frankfurt School see the study of Goran Therborn in *New Left Review* 63(1970) and for a critique of structuralist anthropology see Jairus Banaji's article in *New Left Review* 64(1970).

There are many critiques of Althusser but few which start from any comprehension of his writings. The following are exceptions to this general rule:

| Robin Blackburn and Gareth Stedman Jones |

Norman Geras, "Fetishism in Marx's *Capital*" *New Left Review* 65 (1971).

André Glucksmann, "Un structuralisme ventriloque," *Les Temps Modernes* (mai 1967).

Ernest Mandel, "Althusser 'Corrects' Marx," *International*, September 1970.

Fernando Martinez, "Leer a Althusser," *Pensamiento Crítico*, 41 (Cuba, 1970).

Jacques Rancière, "Louis Althusser y el Marxismo," in *Lecturas de Althusser*, edited by Kolarz (Buenos Aires: 1969).

New Situation, New Strategy: Serge Mallet and André Gorz

Dick Howard

Though it was a stunning defeat for the French Left, the advent of the Gaullist Fifth Republic did not bring with it the “fascism” that the electoral propaganda of the French Communist Party (PCF) had predicted; and De Gaulle’s “personal power” proved to be only the final stage in parliament’s already evident loss of power to the technocrats representing the interests of monopoly capital. Indeed, the defeat of 1958 may have been a blessing in disguise for the French Left, for it led to a wide rethinking of the entire revolutionary problematic, its goals and its methods. Serge Mallet is no doubt correct in writing that “May, 1968 is the first reply to June, 1958, the first socialist struggle answering to the conditions of modern capitalism.”¹

The failure of the PCF to propose any viable alternative to Gaullism, and its inability to successfully oppose France’s colonial war in Algeria, led to the formation of what was then called a “new left.” This new force was a heterogeneous collection of opponents of the war, ranging from the neocapitalist technocrats

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typified by J.-J. Servan-Schreiber, Pierre Mendès-France and the magazine *L'Express*, through dissident Social Democrats and left-wing Christian trade unionists, to the student left organized in the UNEF (*Union Nationale des Etudiants de France*). Many, but by no means all, of these "new leftists" later organized themselves in the PSA (*Parti Socialiste Autonome*), which later became the present PSU (*Parti Socialiste Unifié*). Aside from its effectively leading the opposition to the Algerian War, the most important contribution of this "New Left" in the late 1950s and early 1960s was in the theoretical realm.

The politics of the PCF were based on a misunderstanding of French neocapitalism. Its policies indicate that the PCF, in effect, remained anchored in the past while the society was undergoing a rapid evolution. It, for example, insisted on the dogma of the "absolute pauperization of the working class"; attempted to build a broad, syncretic electoral coalition of the dispossessed strata of the society; ignored the growing consumer society at home and capitalist integration in the Common Market abroad; believed against all evidence to the contrary that the relation of parliamentary to state power had remained unaffected by societal changes; and played at being a highly centralized Leninist party while insisting on the peaceful parliamentary conquest of power.

In the rethinking for which 1958 marks a turning point,² three interrelated problems stand out: (1) the "society of consumption" and the new forms of alienation that it creates; (2) the evolution in the structure and nature of the working class; and (3) the role of the revolutionary party, the nature of the power it must seize, and the type of socialism it will create. These three problems are not abstract theoretical problems; they are posed in a concrete *historical* situation whose two major determinants are the evolution of French neocapitalism and the existence of a very strong French Communist Party.

Prior to World War II French capitalism had been based mainly on family-owned industries, a large peasant class, and a system of high protective tariffs. By the early 1950s France had recovered from the devastation of the war, the peasants were rapidly being drawn into industrial occupations, and the tariff barriers were falling. In this situation, the family industries found themselves forced to either go out of business or merge with their larger competitors; at the same time, the state had taken

complete or partial control of a number of large industries, completing the process inaugurated by the Popular Front of 1936. This led to a new "society of consumption" in which the working class seemingly could be bought off with more automobiles, refrigerators and electrical appliances; significantly, the neologism "*le gadget*" entered the French language.

The strategy of the PCF remained tied to its old conceptions. "Presenting itself as the concrete consciousness of the working class still in formation, and taking power in its name, the Party tended naturally to 'magify' the concept of the working class," and thereby to lose contact with the real evolution of its members.³ Unable to understand the potentialities created by objective developments, the Party continued to force them into its subjective scheme, riding herd on a proletariat whose new needs it was unable to handle. Thus, recalling in 1969 the task he had set for himself at the beginning of the decade, André Gorz writes: "In a word, it was a question of showing that capitalist development, though it attempted to shape the conscious needs of the working class, gave birth to new needs and new exigencies which are potentially revolutionary. And that these new exigencies are slow in producing a new radicalism because they do not recognize themselves in traditional methods and objectives of the trade union and political struggle."⁴

To cope with the new conditions created by neocapitalism, it was necessary first of all to accept their novelty and find out what possibilities they offered. Analysis was focused on fundamental changes in the work process resulting from modified relations of production in highly technological industries. "Only the strata of the active population who are involved in the most advanced processes of technical civilization are capable of formulating its alienations and of envisaging superior forms of development."⁵ These strata, which Serge Mallet was the first to call the "new working class," were seen to pose new kinds of demands, *qualitative* and not quantitative demands. "Precisely because its elementary demands are largely satisfied," writes Mallet, "the new working class is led to pose other problems which cannot find their solution in the sphere of consumption."⁶ Or, in Gorz's words: "It is a question of radicalizing the needs of the masses, of demystifying these needs, of revealing, on the horizon of the immediate objectives of proletarian action, objectives which are properly historical; each concrete need must transcend itself and

understand itself as a need of the whole man; each immediate objective must go beyond itself, finding as its true signification the radical transformation and reappropriation of the world and the society as a whole.”⁷

The notion of a “new working class” and the new strategies proposed were not universally accepted. “Behind the conflict between ‘qualitative’ and ‘quantitative’ demands,” writes Mallet, “lay a difference in the conception of socialism in a developed country, and of the respective roles of the party, the union, and the initiative of the workers. Fundamentally, this conflict rests on the recognition or nonrecognition of differentiations within the working class. In the last analysis, it is not a question of knowing whether or not there exists a working class, but of knowing what are the *vanguard* forces within it, those which have the possibility of formulating clearly the future of the workers, and those which, because of their objective situation, cannot psychologically go beyond their present conditions.”⁸ Mallet argues that, because of “the objective conditions in which it acts and works, the new working class is *par excellence* the vanguard of the revolutionary and socialist movement.”⁹ And he sees in May 1968 a proof of his thesis.

We have to look, first of all, at Mallet’s theory of the “new working class,” elaborated in this book by that title and in numerous articles and case studies between 1958 and the present. It will be clear that this category has nothing to do with notions like the “aristocracy of labor” or the “new middle classes,” as the critics in the French Communist Party charged; nor with conceptions of students and/or youth as a “class,” nor of “educated labor,” the “tertiary sector,” or some combination thereof, as American leftists and their critics have used the term. Mallet’s theoretical analysis is presented in strict Marxist terms; it is not an empirical or descriptive presentation, but one based on theory.¹⁰

Mallet argues that there is no such monolithic entity as the “working class.” “The transformation of the Marxist idea of a social class playing a determined role in production into a ‘magical category’ possessing its own ideology and a ‘collective consciousness’ presenting itself as a community of interests, affective sentiments and modes of life only reflected the intrusion of religious structures into the thought of the socialist movement.”¹¹ To talk of the “working class” as a homogeneous body is, at best,

metaphysical and, at worst, a hangover from the Stalinist subjectivism that identified the Party with the class. One can always discover a “model” of the working class, induced from the forms of organization and struggle in a given period. But not every worker belongs to, or is represented by, the model. Within the dominant mode there are always remnants of past forms as well as forms indicative of the future which coexist with the current dominant mode. It is important to distinguish those models obviously held over from a past epoch, whose *raison d'être* was a specific but now archaic form of production, from those representing objective tendencies created by capitalism's internal dynamic. The former models tend to endure largely because of the staying power of Party and union bureaucrats—and too, as Gorz notes, because of the inability of militants to propose alternative models more suited to the times.

In arguing for or against a model of the working class, it is not sufficient to point to figures concerning, say, the number of workers employed in certain sectors, or the total output of those sectors. This is a static view, ignoring the *historical totality*. Rather, the argument must be made, for example, that because of the increasing investment in constant capital (plant, equipment, and the like) and the decreasing investment in variable capital (labor-power), capitalism will *necessarily* have to cut its circulation (distribution) costs in order to increase its profit while at the same time, and for the same reasons, capitalism also will have to produce more and more goods in order to pay for its continued expansion, and it will, therefore, need an ever larger force of nonproductive laborers whose only task is distribution. In this situation, it will have to be pointed out, the forms of struggle will change. For example, the capitalists will have more to lose from strikes than the workers, due to their heavy investment in need of amortization; moreover, a working class using new, more complicated technological equipment will not be so easily replaced by scabs as one performing simple and mechanical tasks on the production line. In other words, statistical evidence proves nothing if the historical evolution of the system is not taken into consideration. As Marx put it in volume III of *Capital*: “all science would be superfluous if the appearance and the essence of things were but one.”

Capital—capitalism—is an historical product. While its essence—the production of surplus-value—remains the same, its

appearance changes. What has to be discovered is "the existence of what one could call a 'structural kernel' of the working class, founded on the part of that class utilized in the determining industrial sectors of each epoch."¹² Mallet's essay, "Syndicalism and Industrial Society," tries to show the relation between the forms taken by capital and those of the working class and its struggle.

Following the work of Alain Touraine, Mallet speaks of three phases, or moments,¹³ of industrial development, labeled "A," "B," and "C." Moment "A" is familial or group capitalism, which is characterized by many small enterprises, each limited geographically to a fixed area and each producing an entire product which it markets itself. The division of labor in this moment is minimal; each worker knows the entirety of his trade, his "calling"; he is his own master in the work process, and he is paid a piece-wage. Even if he produces only a part of the final product, the worker still produces something entirely and can identify with his product. The worker in moment "A" is thus different from his artisan predecessor only in that *he no longer owns the means of production, nor the final product*. This is the first stage in the accumulation of capital—when the worker, dispossessed of his land and tools, must come to work for the capitalist.

The reaction of the worker in this first moment is that of an owner: he defends his (only remaining) possession—his art. The type of union he will form follows from his situation. The capitalist is implanted in one geographical region, and is dependent on his location for his raw materials, his market, etc. The worker, on the other hand, is a nomad: he is free to leave one job for another, depending on economic conditions. There are no big cities at this time, and few housing problems; the worker easily carries his only property, his profession. International solidarity grows easily in such a situation; one has only to read Marx's enthusiastic descriptions of his early years in Paris to gather this. Solidarity is a solidarity of professionals; their "socialism," with all its internal bickerings, is essentially the demand for the re-appropriation of the means of production stolen from the artisan. Proudhon spoke for these socialists when he wrote, "*La propriété, c'est le vol!*"

Homogeneous objectives unite the workers. There is no need for a centralized bureaucracy, since the workers in each branch

best know their own problems. The level of unionization is high, as is political consciousness, and an autonomous workers' culture grows in this hot house. Syndical action is favored by the conditions of this stage of capitalism: the worker is in demand; the capitalist, working on limited margins, cannot afford to let his raw materials go to waste; and the workers' polyvalent talents are an art which can only be learned through long apprenticeship. The ideology of *anarcho-syndicalism* dominates this moment. The dream is "*Le Grand Soir*," that great evening when all the workers, arms folded across their chests, would stand beside their machines and refuse to work, while the capitalists would hand over (hand back!) the means of production. It seemed clear to the workers that they needed no help from anyone, surely not from the state. As Eugène Pottier wrote in the *Internationale*: "*Producteurs sauvons-nous nous-mêmes!*"

Although the ideology of anarcho-syndicalism, which typifies moment "A," was still alive at the beginnings of the twentieth century, the movement of capital had made that political program obsolete. Moment "B" of industrial development, which is essentially what Marx had in view in *Capital*, wipes out all but isolated remnants of the independent entrepreneur and his polyvalent workman. We need not go too much into detail concerning the salient characteristics of this moment in capital's life; the first volume of *Capital* is rich in illustrations.

The "new working class" of moment "B" differs greatly from its predecessor. The cohesion of the artisan-specialist is replaced by the atomized group of ex-peasants, trained "on the job" to do an infinitely parcelized task whose limits are exactly prescribed by the motions of the machine. The worker is only grist for a machine whose functions he neither understands nor controls. The prophets of this age of industrialization are Ford and Taylor. The production line creates the "pure proletarian," he who literally has nothing, whose bare existence is assured only so that he may return to the factory on the morrow to produce new surplus-value for his capitalist masters. "Specialization" now means the "specialization" to work one machine, which does one part of one job in one specific branch of one given industry. The mobility that characterized the worker of moment "A" is lost: not only is it not possible for the worker to move from job to job—because his "specialization" is too rigid—but new "workers' quarters" grow up—ghettos which house the "reserve army of

labor" that awaits in squalor the beckoning of its master. This is the age of the concentration of capital, of cartels and trusts; it is the age of Hilferding's *Finance Capital*.

Living in barracks, isolated from his fellows in his work and alienated from himself as a producer, the worker, a helpless victim of economic conditions, cannot help but feel himself to be part of a specific class, apart from and opposed to all others. This "class consciousness," however, is not like that of the artisan-worker who knew himself to be a producer of wealth that was stolen from him. Here, the consciousness of exploitation stretches out to the worker in his very being; not only he, but his family as well, feel themselves to be "proletarians"—a term symbolic of misery and *social* exploitation, which now replaces that of "working class" or "producer."

A corresponding change takes place in the conditions of revolutionary activity. From the factory, activity shifts to the workers' quarter; from the anarcho-syndicalist demand for the return of stolen property, the emphasis changes to political and electoral struggle aimed at remedying what is now perceived as social exploitation. At the same time, the immediate power of the unions tends to diminish; the percentage of unionized workers, which was high during moment "A," decreases. The unions themselves become "representative" organs; bureaucracy begins to form, and the individual worker's voice is stifled. The unions tend to place their hopes with a political movement. This tendency is favored by the changing role of the state, which, with the increased cartelization of capitalism, finds itself ever-more involved with the mechanisms of the economy. The unions find it to their advantage to make themselves one of the many conflicting power groups in the state; they become one of the "countervailing powers" and (despite remnants of radical rhetoric) define their goals as "conflictual participation." This leads to a decreasing level of participation in the unions, for the political and economic struggles of the workers are separated by the intervention of their own organization.

The increasingly frequent introduction of automation into the work situation brings about a new moment of development. The difference between productive and nonproductive labor, heretofore easily distinguishable, becomes blurred. What had been evident to the causal observer must now be analyzed in theoretical terms: for *fatiguing, manual labor is not necessarily pro-*

ductive labor. The ex-production-line worker may now become the overseer of a production process to which he adds nothing; his presence is demanded only if something goes wrong with the machine. In the Feedback Era the role of man becomes limited to that of inventor or controller.

The transition from moment "A" to moment "B" was conditioned economically by the completion of the stage of primitive accumulation and the concentration of the means of production in the hands of a relatively small number of capitalists, bringing to an end laissez-faire capitalism. Moment "C" is conditioned by a still greater concentration of capital and by the need for a more rationally organized market. The cost of automated machines is such that only huge monopolies, or the state, can afford them; and the amortization of this huge investment can only be accomplished if it is certain that production will continue on an ever growing scale—that is, if the market is controlled.

The relation among the three moments of industrialization can best be defined in terms of the change in the organic composition of capital. Marx defines the organic composition of capital as the relation between constant capital (buildings, machines, raw materials, etc.) and variable capital (labor-power). During moment "A," the investment in buildings and machines is relatively small, and the majority of the capitalist's investment goes for raw materials and labor-power. In this moment, the capitalist is not the vassal of market conditions: if the market price sinks, he simply reduces his investment in labor-power and raw materials. In so doing, he makes no profit but at least he loses nothing. With the steadily increasing investment in constant fixed capital (i.e., buildings and machines; raw materials are constant circulating capital in Marx's terminology), the capitalist can trust the "free market" to an ever lessening degree; he has to be able to control the market in order to insure his investment. In moment "B," this necessity manifests itself in the form of colonialism. As we enter the third moment of development, however, the situation is aggravated: the percentage of investment in variable capital is very small; and trusts grow increasingly larger simply to be able to finance the extended reproduction necessary for capital to survive. Financial statements show that anywhere from 20% upwards of the trust's income is already committed to repayment of loans. Even this is insufficient. The state has to aid business by building the infrastructures of roads and electrical energy stations, giving

research grants and cost-plus contracts, financing the military-industrial complex, and building the political structures necessary for the success of imperialism. The needed "rationalization" of the home market is provided by the now-famous "one dimensional" consumer.

Turning to the situation of the worker during each of these three moments, we see that it is defined by: (1) the kind of worker needed and the conditions of his supply and demand; and (2) the capitalist's market possibilities. During the first moment, the demand for workers is greater than their supply, while the market remains anarchic. During "B" the supply of worker-peasants exceeds the demand, while the market fluctuates somewhat more regularly (this is the period of Marx's decennial crises), enabling employers to hire and fire in accordance with the fluctuations. During moment "C" one is struck by the fact that the cost of labor-power has ceased to be an important component of the capitalist's expenditures. What counts is the continual sale of an increasing number of goods so that the high initial investment can be amortized. Moreover, the capitalists must train a new kind of proletariat to run the complex technological machinery, a proletariat that not only knows how to work the machines in operation at the time it enters the work force, but one that is trained to learn. This accounts for the tremendous growth in the number of educated workers in the past years and the growth of junior colleges, etc.; its significance for a socialist strategy will be considered below.

During moment "C" it is necessary for the capitalist to integrate the worker into the firm. Profit can no longer be squeezed out of the workers by direct means. The production of relative surplus-value, begun in "B," must be refined. What is needed is a qualitative increase in productivity resulting from the efficient organization of work by means still more sophisticated than those of Ford and Taylor. With the entry of capitalism into moment "C" comes the growth of the "social sciences" and their use in "rationalizing" the work process.¹⁴ The profits of the firm are not the sum total of the surplus-value extorted from the individual productive workers, but are rather the result of the work of the entire productive unity who combine in producing the product.

Mallet distinguishes two types of "new working class" that come into being in moment "C." There are those who work in

an industrial situation properly so-called, but who differ from the workers in moment "B" because, to quote Mallet, "through the jobs which it creates, automation—even if it totally eliminates the relation of man to object—destroys the parcelization of work and, at the level of the working group, reconstitutes the synthetic viewpoint of polyvalent work.¹⁵ In other words, there is a return to the artisan-type worker of moment "A," except that here the work is done not individually but by a collective. The worker in an automated plant is not the slave of the machine: on the contrary, it is he who makes the machine run, who must be able to repair it if it breaks down, and who must be able to adapt himself to new "generations" of machines. This worker has grown up in the modern machine age; for him the machine is not a mystery but something he wants to know and understand. He is a trained worker, usually with at least some technical training beyond high school, and who wants to put his training to use in a creative manner.

The second type of worker in the "new working class" is what in the United States is classified as an engineer. He works in what the French call "*Bureaux d'études*," roughly equivalent to the research and development unit of a large corporation. Highly trained, the engineer wants to use his talents freely. He reacts against the hierarchical and bureaucratic working manner of the old style organization, and he chafes under archaic rules laid down by a management which is far away from the workplace and which only looks at abstract cost figures in making its decisions. The engineer sees the irrationality of separating ownership and control from those who actually make the machines and run them; their action in May 1968 showed that for this reason engineers today are closer to the working class than to management.

On the basis of empirical studies of strikes in moment "C" industries between 1958 and 1962, Mallet sketched some aspects of a new form of unionism he sees in the offing, and which he calls "Company Unionism" (*syndicalisme d'entreprise*).¹⁶ Company Unions are characterized by a high degree of unionization, varying from 50% to 90%. The workers are usually young; they have secure jobs; and their tasks are such that they work in relatively small teams on potentially creative jobs. The Company Union is generally organized in the entire firm, no matter how large and dispersed its branches. This means an end to the anti-

quated craft unions. Since the basic unit is the firm, unionized members take an active interest in its financial affairs. Grievances concern not only the work situation or wages, but also the gestion of the entire firm, for if the firm loses money and must cut back production, it is the workers who suffer directly.¹⁷ The result is that the traditional refusal of unions to join management in the direction of the firm's business becomes a thing of the past. At the same time, the Company Union is separated from the bureaucratic national organization; the local level asserts its competence to handle its own problems.

The high percentage of organized workers and their technological competence and knowledge of the firm's affairs lead to new types of action. Strikes need not be total work stoppages, which harm the worker and his family more than they harm the firm. One example is the so-called "*grève perlée*" in which short, well-coordinated work stoppages foul up the synchronization of the machines, costing the workers perhaps an hour's pay while capitalist production loses many more hours. Another example is the action of the workers at Peugeot, who threatened a work stoppage that would have halted the scheduled appearance of a new model. Faced with the risk of losing a large investment in advertising and with not being able to fill its orders, the firm quickly gave in. During the May 1968 strikes at least one highly technological firm, the CSF at Brest, began producing under new conditions of work, without management having anything to do with the new organization. Had the occupations continued, this example would no doubt have been followed elsewhere.

In his conclusion to *La nouvelle classe ouvrière*, Mallet notes that:

The absenteeism of the citizens which today is deplored by all those democratic bleeding hearts (*bonnes consciences démocratiques*) is compensated by the development of a spirit of responsibility in socio-economic organizations. This is probably the most interesting aspect, and that having the most important consequences, in the evolution of Company Unionism. It leads us, in effect, to revise fundamentally the entirety of our political habits and our conception of the exercise of democracy.¹⁸

The new form of struggle that we have been seeing recently, notably in the May 1968 uprising in France, has an objective

basis in the evolution of the working class. True, as Mallet noted more than ten years ago in *Les Temps Modernes*, "the direct passage from class consciousness—the sentiment of being exploited together—to socialist consciousness—the demand for the collective appropriation of the means of production—is never the act of the totality of the working class. . . ."¹⁹ The point of the theory of the new working class is not simply to say what *is* but rather to point in the direction of what is *becoming* and to elaborate a political strategy that will not be made inadequate by the objective evolution of the capitalist system. Before turning to look at one such strategy, that of André Gorz, we should take note of two final points in Mallet's analysis of Company Unionism:²⁰

On an organizational basis, Company Unionism returns to certain traits of the old craft unions: high participation in union activity, de-bureaucratization by the revaluing of the union branches in each enterprise, an orientation towards managing the firm by the workers.

There is another common trait to both forms: distrust as concerns the traditional forms of political struggle and the belief in the validity of organized union action. It has been possible to speak of a Renaissance of a "modern anarcho-syndicalism."²¹

In moments "A" and "B" the life of the worker was clearly not separated from his life as consumer; if a "consumer class" existed here, it was only that of the capitalists and their higher paid lackeys. In the third moment of development, the worker's life as worker and his life as consumer *seem* to be distinct. But this impression, although fostered by mass production of what had once been luxury goods as well as by mass culture, is false. The consumer status of the worker is economically and psychologically dependent on his work situation. Powerlessness at work implies powerlessness in society at large; for economic democracy is the key to democracy. This fundamental Marxian insight is too often ignored by intellectuals whose only direct social experience lies in the sphere of consumption and in its accompanying ideology. If capitalism created the consumer society, it was only because of the separation of use and exchange values, and of the continual race to produce increasingly more of the latter.

The growing role of consumption in workers' lives has led many to despair of a proletarian revolution on the grounds that the working class has been bought off, and to place their hopes,

à la Marcuse, in the "dispossessed." While the new consumer society, giving the working class a larger slice of the economic pie, has apparently dulled the militancy of the anticapitalist forces, the May Revolt in France, and the unrest of younger workers throughout the world suggests that this is only temporary and that the hegemony of bourgeois ideology is nearing its end. What is true is that the old forms of struggle are no longer relevant to the new demands, and that a new socialist *strategy* is needed.

Why strategy? Gorz distinguishes "strategy" from "tactics." Tactics are *syncretic*; they attempt to unite disparate activities around a goal that is determined in advance and that need not relate to each of the activities concerned. Typical tactics are Popular Frontism, union with the "patriotic bourgeoisie," or recent antiwar movements. Strategy, in Gorz's usage, is *synthetic*; it seeks to unite disparate activities around a goal that is shown to be implicit in all of them and of which *each* is a particular incarnation. Thus, Gorz writes, "The specific aspirations [of different sectors of society] can be articulated among themselves only in function of a common horizon which contains all of them while at the same time going beyond each of them: the horizon of a socialist society, itself pluralist and 'articulated.'"²² The function of a socialist strategy is to pose "immediate objectives . . . [which] concretely prefigure it [socialism] in certain aspects, [and which] set in motion the revolutionary process without *necessarily* taking socialism as their *explicit* short-term goal."²³

A socialist strategy has a dual role. The May Revolt showed that the immediate refusal of the working class still in moment "B" to be exploited by the capitalists was insufficient to take and to hold *political* power; mediations by which the "immediate refusal and its empirical limits can be surpassed toward a conscious and methodical refusal," must be presented.²⁴ Secondly, in advanced capitalist countries, "misery is not so insupportable that the exploited classes are ready to take no matter what risks to rid themselves of bourgeois domination. They will not be won to the revolutionary struggle unless the revolutionary party shows, in its own behavior as well, that individual and collective liberation is not contradictory with rationality, but the condition of a superior type of rationality."²⁵ To those who would argue here that revolution is still a felt need by a very large number, even a majority, of the traditional working class, let alone those dominated by imperialism, Gorz would, I think, give the same

answer that Mallet gave when he was accused of heresy for speaking of a “new” working class and neglecting the “old”: it is a question of analyzing the direction in which capitalism is moving (and no one can doubt that it is moving), and of planning one’s strategy from an *historical* perspective. The “new” and “old” working classes coexist, and the socialism they will create will be “articulated” in terms of their common needs.

Turning now to the question “What Strategy?” we must realize that the very acceptance of the need for a strategy implies the rejection of the notion of “*Le Grand Soir*”; it implies the acceptance of the need for a series of “reforms,” each of which is planned and understood as only one stage leading to the revolutionary seizure of power. Gorz’s “reformism” here is similar to that of Rosa Luxemburg, who spoke of the necessity of steering a course between “two reefs: abandonment of the mass character or abandonment of the final goal; the fall back to sectarianism or the fall into bourgeois reformism; anarchism or opportunism.”²⁶ This question of “reform or revolution” is not, however, an either/or; its solution is *dialectical*. In the words of Rosa Luxemburg:

The solution to this apparent paradox lies in the dialectical process of the class struggle of the proletariat fighting for democratic conditions in the state and at the same time gaining class consciousness. Because it gains this class consciousness and organizes itself in the course of the struggle, it achieves a democratization of the bourgeois state, and, in the measure that it itself ripens, makes the bourgeois state ripe for a socialist revolution.²⁷

The point is that the revolution is made by the masses, not by their leaders or “their” party. As Gorz writes, “If you simply suppress the oppression (that is, if the oppression disappears by itself) without the victim having had the apprenticeship of freedom in his actions, then . . . the victim rushes immediately into a new slavery.”²⁸ “The problem posed to revolutionary leaders,” he writes in another essay, “is therefore this: consciousness (*la prise de conscience*) is necessary for action, but only action can provoke consciousness (*la prise de conscience*). The only way to demonstrate to the oppressed that they *can* refuse the religious and legal taboos, that they are free to act, is to show them that they *already* act and refuse.”²⁹

Gorz's political strategy is *not* Leninist. In his essay, "Reform and Revolution," he writes that "the Bolshevik conception of the Party as the organized vanguard *separated from the masses*, contained—no matter what the intentions of the leaders were—the seeds of the later degenerations of the 'soviet power.'"³⁰ Gorz's view is far closer to that of Rosa Luxemburg, who insisted that in the revolutionary movement "the masses will be the active chorus, and the leaders only the 'speaking parts,' the interpreters of the will of the masses."³¹ Gorz is, of course, dealing with a capitalism far more subtle in its manipulations than the one Rosa Luxemburg confronted; yet his goal is the same. "The task, then," he argues, "is to make perceptible that which is not perceived." The revolutionary party must "create aspirations . . . give the masses radical needs," "pose problems."³² His is not a voluntarism of revolutionary will; he writes, for example, that "to pose the question of power is first to ask oneself what must be done in order that the question of power pose itself in the facts."³³

For Gorz the political party is a "necessary evil."

It is necessary because a center is needed where experiences can confront one another, be coordinated and give a synthetic perspective, a political translation and a strategy against the bourgeois state. But it is an evil because, opposed to a centralized state power, it reflects the necessity of centralizing a revolutionary enterprise having as its ultimate goal the liquidation of *all* centralized states. As a central organization, the party must therefore be understood as the transitory structure which will assure the liquidation of the bourgeois state *in order, finally, to liquidate itself.*³⁴

The failure of the May Revolt, argues Gorz, proved the need for a party, without which the taking of power is not possible: "Without a revolutionary movement there can be no revolutionary party; without a revolutionary party there can be no durable revolutionary movement. That is what the French May movement proved once again."³⁵ The party is needed to develop the mediations between the objectives of the immediate struggle and the longer term development of the masses; "in the absence of such mediations, the movement, incapable of going beyond the moment of refusal, takes itself as immediate end, as a festival and as liberating violence."³⁶ Yet, as Gorz himself admits, until

May his own strategy spoke very little of the role of the party. This was so, he argues, because the objective conditions were not yet ripe, and to think of a party and its role in abstraction would be idealist voluntarism. Since May, however, things have changed.

In his analysis of the May Revolt, Gorz speaks of "at least" four functions that the party must fulfill. (1) *Analysis and theoretical elaboration*. The party must continually analyze the changing structure of capitalism, make concrete empirical studies of the contradictions arising within the system, and analyze and diffuse information concerning struggles in process. (2) *Ideological synthesis of the different sectorial demands*. There must be a political program, continually revised in order to integrate all phases of the struggle in their own terms and not syncretically. The ideological synthesis must provide a weapon with which the party can oppose the ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie in order to create an anticapitalist "bloc" (Gorz uses Gramsci's term), and not simply an "alliance." (3) *Political education and direction*. The party must represent a "positive negation" of capitalist society, a living contradiction within it. Its program must do more than reflect the present stage of a struggle; it must catalyze new struggle. "One of the most certain means of reinforcing the combativeness of the workers is to push back the limits of the possible by showing the possibility and the conditions of possibility of changes which seem out of reach. . . ."³⁷ The program makes the various demands coherent by placing them within a transitional whole. (4) *Taking power and transforming the state*. This is of course the principal function of the party. The Leninist model is not applicable to this function; the party must be organized democratically and on a large scale. Demands must originate from the base, in the work situation. The demand for "workers' power" in capitalist enterprises is more revolutionary than the nationalization of industry if the nationalized industries maintain the old, hierarchical organization of the work situation. In Gorz's view:

The working hypothesis on which the revolutionary party must base its activity is no longer a sudden seizure of power, made possible by the breakdown of capitalist mechanisms or a military defeat of the bourgeois state, but that of a patient and conscious strategy aimed at provoking a crisis in the system by the masses' refusal to bend to its logic, and then resolving this crisis in the direction of their demands.³⁸

This new party does not yet exist, and it is certain that the PCF will not become such a party. Gorz sees, rather, a continuing undermining by small leftist groups who will ultimately unite because, alone, they are not strong enough to create the conditions of final victory.

Gorz's demand for a strategy, his attempt to formulate the conditions such a strategy would have to fulfill, and his view of what socialism must be, all have their roots in the Marxist notion of history as reformulated by Sartre in his *Critique de la raison dialectique*. History is interpreted as a series of human, praxical "totalizations" occurring on different levels, each of which surpasses the one that made it possible. Each totalization is the solidification of human *praxis*, and as the product of *praxis*, it can be changed by man. This series of totalizations is a mediated one, conditioned by the fact that the totalizing actions of men take place in an external world whose primary characteristic is *scarcity*. As long as scarcity dominates man, the "qualitative leap" to socialism is not possible. To those who argue that capitalism has vanquished scarcity, Gorz points out that rather than eliminating it, capitalism reproduces scarcity on new levels: scarcity of time, of raw materials, of energy, and even scarcity of fresh air to breathe, green grass, and the peace and quiet for which one longs. The existence and reproduction of scarcity are the source of the alienation that capitalist society re-creates and uses to perpetuate its domination by mystifying the needs and reifying the actions of man.

The goal of a socialist strategy is to liberate totalizing human *praxis* from the constraints of capitalist alienation. This means that it is not sufficient to pose the abstract negation of capitalism. What is needed is a *positive negation*, a viable alternative program that incarnates the new needs, new capacities and new socialist rationality. In *Strategy for Labor*, Gorz puts it this way: "The alternative model presents itself, on the contrary, as the *sense* of the already existing struggles, as the positive image of the autonomy which the working class, in its immediacy, affirms in a negative and partial way by contesting the power of capital."³⁹ In *Le socialisme difficile*, he argues:

The politicization of the masses doesn't start from politics, nor action or struggle alone. Political commitment and choice are, in fact, the final position of a development of consciousness (*prise de conscience*) which

never starts with politics, i.e., with the problem of the organization of society and social relations, but from the direct and fragmentary experience of a change *which is necessary because it is possible*.

The demand for change, in other words, does not arise from the *impossibility* of accepting what is, but from the *possibility* of no longer accepting what is.⁴⁰

One does not “prove” socialism’s superiority over capitalism by demonstrating that it can do the same things as capitalism, but *quantitatively* better; rather, it must be shown that a *qualitative* alternative is possible *now*.

The American reader will be struck by Gorz’s stress on the ways in which alienation manifests itself in modern society. At first glance, Gorz’s analyses seem to share a common orientation with those of Herbert Marcuse and others. There are, however, two fundamental differences between Gorz and Marcuse. Gorz argues that Marcuse’s pessimism concerning the working class is based on an overly Freudian, fixed view of human nature as a “naturalistic” and “biologicalistic” structure that can be manipulated and repressed. Against this, Gorz takes the more optimistic Sartrean view that man is his *praxis*, and that conscious *praxis* is continually able to transcend itself and its conditions, totalizing itself and creating its own history. More important, Gorz insists that a revolutionary strategy must begin from the work situation. In *Strategy for Labor*, he cites V. Foa: “To act politically is to link the alienation of the producer in the process of production to the alienation of the producer in society.”⁴¹ In *Le socialisme difficile*, he is more explicit:

It is from the *place of production* that the struggle must necessarily begin. For: (1) it is at the place of production that the workers undergo most directly the despotism of capital, and have the direct experience of their social subordination; (2) it is there that capital, by methods of the division of labor which, often without *technical* necessity, constitute *methods of domination*, puts itself to work producing decomposed, molecularized, humiliated men which it can then dominate in society; (3) finally, and especially, it is only there that the workers exist as a group, as a real *collective force* capable of a collective action which is direct and daily, and which can just as well modify their condition in its most immediately intolerable aspects as it can force the class enemy to confront them as he really is.⁴²

The contradictions that Gorz sees in the production process rejoin those described by Mallet. Gorz's entire analysis is anchored in Mallet's moment "C," and there is no need to repeat what has already been said concerning that subject. One problem, the relation between students and workers, to which Gorz devotes an essay in *Le socialisme difficile*, deserves brief mention, especially since the analysis that he presents there played an important role in determining the strategy of the UNEF and the SNEsup (the university teachers union) in the period leading up to May 1968.

Just as capitalism cannot be content with simple reproduction but must continue to expand in order to remain in existence, so, too, the formation of the working class, from the point of view of capital, must take place on a continually increasing scale. Gorz sees three contradictions at work here: (1) The cost of the production of socially necessary labor (i.e., highly educated labor, trained to learn, and to use highly complex machinery, etc.) is increasing. The state, however, still does not want to, and due to its own fiscal crisis, cannot take over these costs, resulting in the surface manifestations of the present widespread crises in the universities. (2) The nature and level of education demanded by the new productive forces of capital clash with the level of education that would maintain the worker as a docile domesticated animal. Gorz cites the president of Kodak-Pathé, who admits that the existence of too many educated workers is a risk for the established order. The solution chosen by the capitalists is specialization: workers are trained in technical schools, where they learn one discipline; "departments" are formed at universities; the traditional humanistic unity of knowledge is discarded, and education becomes apprenticeship. This is self-defeating, however, for in this age of rapidly evolving techniques, a *polyvalent* working class is needed, and the function of education is to teach men and women how to learn. (3) Finally, work itself takes on an increasingly autonomous and an increasingly social character at the same time that the worker is subordinated by the hierarchy of the firm and maintained in an atomized relation to his fellows. This condition of hierarchy and atomization cannot be maintained: "In effect, once a certain degree of culture is attained, the need for intellectual, professional and existential autonomy is felt with the same intensity by highly qualified workers as are the unsatisfied needs of workers in old industries."⁴³

A socialist strategy demanding structural reforms⁴⁴ can use

these contradictions to its own advantage. The reforms must come from the base, and must be “*applied or controlled by those who demand [them]*. . . . Structural reform always includes a *decentralization* and a gearing down of the power of decision, a *restriction of the power of the State or of Capital*, an *extension of popular power*.”⁴⁵ Won through direct struggle, these reforms increase the contradictions between the forms of productive relations and the private ownership of the means of production. At the same time, it is necessary that these structural reforms point beyond themselves to a new model of social rationality. May 1968 showed that “even though they discover their antagonism to capital, the intellectual workers will not break with the capitalist ideology unless socialism appears to them as a superior form of rationality and of enhancing and using their capacities.”⁴⁶

It should be clear that the three problems on which the French “New Left” focused its theoretical attention are tightly inter-related, and that the analyses of Mallet and Gorz complement one another.⁴⁷ There are problems with the analyses and a number of questions can be raised. What is the “new working class”? How do its needs and possibilities relate to the other sectors of the working class? How will Gorz’s “necessary” but “evil” party be formed? And how can we be sure that it will dissolve itself? How can an actual student-worker alliance be realized? Does the theory relate to conditions in the United States? How does the nature of imperialism and the revolt in the Third World fit into the theory? How can the new revolutionary forces break down the capitalist hegemony and introduce their own? And so on.

Although there are problems with the theory, it seems to me that both Mallet’s concept of a “new working class” and Gorz’s strategy are fruitful tools. The importance of Mallet’s sociological studies is that they force us to abandon our static conceptions and incantations about the “working class,” and they demand that we understand that class in its determinate evolution in relation to the changing structure of the means of production. They call on us to rethink Marx’s work in a dynamic framework and to understand capitalism as an historical totality. They point out one material basis for the growth of the New Left today, and present a perspective for understanding the growth of the anti-technocratic forces of a “new anarcho-syndicalism.” The crucial problem of the “articulation” of a new, “rich” socialism created

by all the dispossessed of today is posed in terms of this dynamic, historical understanding of the capitalist totality.

Gorz's strategy, it seems to me, is significant first of all because it is our only choice. May 1968 showed that revolution *is* possible and necessary in advanced capitalism, but that this revolution will *not* come through either a spontaneous uprising or through the actions of a small minority. Gorz is correct in his rejection of the Leninist party and in his demand that the revolution be incarnated at the base; the parallel between his thought and that of Rosa Luxemburg is significant. Moreover, Gorz's use of the insights developed in Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique* is a valuable contribution to our understanding of alienation and its overcoming. His is an excellent example of a dialectical analysis of the everyday world of modern capitalism.⁴⁸ The most important aspect of Gorz's thought, I think, is his realism, his recognition of both obstacles and contradictions. His view of the party as a "necessary evil," and the role it must assume is not satisfactorily worked out; yet it does provide us with the elements for analyzing a problem that we cannot continue to ignore. As Gorz states at the beginning of *Strategy for Labor*, "there is no crisis in the working class movement, but there is a crisis in the theory of the working class movement."⁴⁹

Notes

1. Serge Mallet, *La nouvelle classe ouvrière* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 4th Edition, 1969), New Preface, "Mai-juin 68: première grève pour la gestion," p. 9.
2. See Serge Mallet's personal reflections on the effect of the Gaullist victory and PCF impotence in the concluding chapter of *Le gaullisme et la gauche*. Mallet had been a Communist militant for more than fifteen years, accepting the argument that the Party was the progressive historical force. See also André Gorz's *La morale de l'histoire*, begun in 1956, for another "New Left" analysis of the impasse of Communist Party politics.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
4. André Gorz, *Réforme et Révolution* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), p. 9. (This is a collection of essays from Gorz's books *Stratégie ouvrière et néo-capitalisme* and *Le socialisme difficile*, with a new preface written in May, 1969.)

5. Mallet, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.
7. André Gorz, *La morale de l'histoire* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1959), pp. 34-35.
8. Mallet, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
10. On Mallet's view of a Marxist sociology, cf., the Introduction to the 1st edition of *La nouvelle classe ouvrière*, and especially his essay "Marxisme et sociologie" in *Les cahiers du centre d'études socialistes*, no. 34-35 (1963).

It should be noted that the following discussion refers especially to France, and would have to be modified to be applicable to conditions in the United States. It, nonetheless, has the virtue of presenting a clear schema in terms of which one can look at other historical conditions, guided always by their empirical specificity.

11. Serge Mallet, "Une classe ouvrière en devenir," in *Arguments*, Janvier-Mars, 1959, p. 16. (This issue of *Arguments*, with articles by Mottez, Touraine, Mothe, LeBrun, Barjonet, Debray, Collinet, Dofny, Crozier, and Mallet, kindled the discussion of a "new working class," though the term was not yet used.)
12. Serge Mallet, "Luttes ouvrières dans les secteurs avancés," *Les cahiers du centre d'études socialistes*, no. 7-8, 1961, p. 4.
13. I use the Hegelian term "moment" here to indicate that these three categories may and do coexist.
14. The March 22nd Movement was quite aware of this. In a tract they distributed early in the agitation leading to May, they point to the role played by social scientists in the service of capital. The tract, "Pourquoi les sociologues," was reprinted in *Esprit*, May, 1968, and in Robin Blackburn and Alexander Cockburn, eds., *Student Power* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969). French capitalism has lagged behind that of the United States in its use of social scientists to increase productivity. Significantly, sociology as an academic discipline was separated from philosophy in France only after 1958.
15. Serge Mallet, *La nouvelle classe ouvrière* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1st edition, 1963), p. 58.
16. This should not be confused with the United States version: unions, formed at and doing the will of the bosses. To understand Mallet's discussion, it should be recalled that in France there exist three national unions: the CGT, communist controlled; the CFDT, formerly the CFTC, a Christian union now desacralized, and FO, originally founded by the CIA as a reformist union, but some of whose local branches are controlled by Trotskyists, left-communists, etc. At the plant level, each union has a craft union (metal workers etc.), which vies for power with the others. Compared with U.S. unions, the French are far behind in terms of benefits won; and it should be noted that they do not have the huge strike

funds of their U.S. counterparts, nor have they won the closed shop or other union rights. The divisions among the unions have often worked to end strike movements far more effectively than any device of the bosses.

It should also be remarked here that Mallet's discussion of "company unionism" is corroborated by the studies of Pierre Belleville in his book *Une nouvelle classe ouvrière* (Julliard, 1963). Belleville's study is more descriptive and less theoretical than that of Mallet, and his notion of the "new working class" is less precisely defined. The crux of his argument is that new forms of struggle are developing due to changes in the structure of capitalism, and that the working class is not undergoing the "absolute pauperization" predicted by the PCF. Belleville sees, as does Mallet, the dangers that the new unionism may be co-opted, but argues that it is a necessary phase.

17. The workers' demands may even extend beyond the individual firm. Mallet is fond of citing the role of the unions in the reconversion of the Loire-Atlantic region of France. Belleville presents a lengthy study of the fight to reorganize the mining industry, a fight led by the workers themselves.
18. Mallet, *op. cit.*, p. 245.
19. Serge Mallet, *Le gaullisme et la gauche* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1965), p. 51.
20. This is not to say that Mallet does not himself develop a strategy from his analyses. He does. Mallet is actively engaged in the politics of the PSU, and is a member of its central committee. He is also active as a political journalist for *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *Tribune Socialiste*. Yet, his strategic conceptions are not so rich as those of Gorz, which I treat here as complementing Mallet.
21. Mallet, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-93.
22. André Gorz, "Limites et possibilités du mouvement de mai," *Les Temps Modernes* (Août-Septembre, 1968), p. 253.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
24. Gorz, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 47. The stress on a *new socialist rationality* runs throughout Gorz's work. "Rationality" does not refer to the formal, instrumental reasoning that arose with capitalism's need to control and dominate a world of pliant things measured in terms of exchange values. It is not the "logic" that has adapted itself to the reifications of human *praxis* in a world of alienation. What Gorz has in mind is not a formal process of domination, but rather a dialectical rationality grounded in actual human *praxis*. A socialist rationality is not abstract; it is concrete, rooted in the everyday lives and needs of men and women. Thus, for example, in another essay, Gorz stresses this second aspect of socialist strategy somewhat differently, writing: "The emancipation of the working class can only constitute for the workers a total stake justifying a total risk if the action of struggle has already been an experiment for them in self-

organization, in initiative, in collective decision-making, in short, an experiment in the possibility of their own emancipation." (*Socialist Register*, 1968, p. 125.) The stress on "a superior type of rationality" in the citation in the text, and in others below, is important because the Left too frequently leaves "their rationality" to the bourgeoisie, not realizing that it is necessary to oppose not simply life-styles but world views, since the former imply the latter, consciously or not.

26. *Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*, edited by Dick Howard (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 130 and 302.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 178–179.
28. André Gorz, *Le traître*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1958, p. 184.
29. Gorz, *La morale . . . op. cit.*, p. 160. Compare this with Marx's position: "We do not face the world in a doctrinaire manner with a new principle, saying 'Here is the truth, kneel here.' . . . We do not say 'Stop your struggles, they are stupid; we want to give you the true watchword of the struggle.' We only show the world why it actually struggles, and consciousness is a thing it *must* acquire even if it does not want to" (Marx to Ruge, September, 1843).
30. Gorz, *Réforme et Révolution*, *op. cit.*, p. 246.
31. Luxemburg, *op. cit.*, p. 268.
32. André Gorz, *Le socialisme difficile* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967), pp. 18 and 96.
33. Gorz, *Réforme et Révolution*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 247.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
37. Gorz, *Les limites . . . , op. cit.*, pp. 248–249.
38. Gorz, *Le socialisme difficile*, *op. cit.*, p. 107.
39. André Gorz, *Stratégie ouvrière et néo-capitalisme* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), p. 162.
40. Gorz, *Le socialisme difficile*, *op. cit.*, pp. 99–100.
41. Gorz, *Stratégie . . . , op. cit.*, p. 33.
42. Gorz, *Le socialisme difficile*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
44. I have not stressed here Gorz's role—as an editor of *Les Temps Modernes*, and as contributor—concerning the strategy of structural reform. The reader interested in this debate in its concrete applications should consult, besides Gorz's own work, the articles by Bruno Trentin, Ernest Mandel, V. Foa, Lelio Basso and others in *Les Temps Modernes*, the *International Socialist Journal*, and elsewhere.
45. Gorz, *Stratégie . . . , op. cit.*, p. 13, n. 2.
46. Gorz, *Réforme et Révolution*, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

47. This is not to assert that the two can be assimilated. Quite the contrary. The question of their differences cannot be dealt with here, however. I have tried to stress the complementarity of their views to show how they provide the elements of a modern analysis and strategy in the lines of the "unknown dimension." However, Gorz's position is still evolving, particularly under the influence of May 1968 and its aftermath. Already, his controversial article, "Destroy the University," *Les Temps Modernes* (avril 1970) marked a radical shift, and seemed to me to indicate a return to his earlier "existentialist" period. When speaking of it at that time, he still saw a continuity. Since then, especially with his article "Techniques, techniciens et lutte de classes" (*Les Temps Modernes* [août-septembre, 1971]), and his speech at the November, 1971 *Telos* Conference, this tendency toward what I call "vintage" existentialism has increased—though Gorz disagrees with my analysis. For the purposes of this article, it is sufficient to note that there is a rethinking in progress and to suggest that its ultimate direction will be determined by the evolution of the struggle in France (and in Italy—for, it seems the dominant motif in Gorz's thought at present is the strategy of the Italian group *Lotta Continua*).
48. Gorz's work recapitulates much of the "unknown dimension," bringing it to bear in a practical and contemporary context. His important notion of anticapitalist structural reform is closely related to the position of Gramsci and Korsch; his stress on the subjective *praxis* of the working class parallels the views of not only Lukács and the Council Communists, but also that of the whole anti-Stalinist tradition; his concern with the problems of alienation (whose theoretical foundations he analyzes in his early works: *Le traître* and *La morale de l'histoire*) and their modern forms adds a practical dimension to the work of the Frankfurt School and the work of Wilhelm Reich, etc.
49. Gorz, *Stratégie . . . , op. cit.*, p. 24.

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